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## The Heir Presumptive and the Heir Apparent.

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OF CARLINGFORD," "NEIGHBOURS ON THE GREEN,"  
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### CHAPTER VIII.

IT was a dull morning—one of those grey days which sometimes come in autumn, when all the winds are still, when the changed and ruddy foliage hangs like a sort of illumination against the colourless atmosphere, and the air is soft and warm, though without sunshine. There had been a great deal of stir in the house in the morning. Two of the visitors had gone hastily away, summoned by urgent business, which coincided strangely with the despairing account of the covers which John, prompted by Letitia, had carried to the smoking-room on the previous night. These gentlemen had been driven from the door, one in the dog-cart, one in Letitia's own brougham, and the going away had caused a little bustle and commotion. The others had gone out late to the discredited covers, not expecting much sport. But by noon all was quiet about the house, where, as yet, Mrs. Parke was not visible, nor yet the unwelcome visitor who occupied Mary's room, making her wonder, with a sense of disgust, whether she ever could go into it again. She went to the sundial with great perturbation and excitement, just as the stable clock was preparing, with a loud note of warning, which made a great sound in the still air, to strike twelve. The sundial was at some little distance from the house, in a little dell on the outer edge of the gardens, surrounded by blooming shrubs on one side and on the other by some of the large trees of the little park—a very small one, but made the most of—which surrounded the house. It was fully open to the grey still light in which there were no

shadows, and a little damp with the autumnal mists. Mary wondered at herself for having given this rendezvous when she came to think of it. She might just as well have asked Ralph to meet her in the drawing-room or the library, where at this time of the day there was nobody. There were, indeed, two lady visitors in the house, but the morning-room was their usual haunt; and she now reflected that she was much more likely to be seen by them in this opening, which was swept from end to end by the full daylight, than in any room in the house. She asked herself whether it was some romantic association—some thought of what people did in novels—which had made her suggest a meeting out of doors. How ridiculous it was! How much more likely to be remarked! But it was too late to think of this. She wandered through the garden, gathering a few late blossoms from the geraniums, which were just about to be taken up for the winter, and a handful of the straggling long stalks of mignonette, which had a kind of melancholy sweetness in which there was a touch of frost and decay. Mary could never in all her life after endure the scent of mignonette.

She saw him after awhile coming, directed by the footman, whom he had evidently asked the way without any veiling of intention, rather—as she suddenly perceived to be quite natural, and the thing she ought to have expected—with an ostentatious disclosure of what he wanted. She could almost imagine him saying that he had an appointment with a lady. The shock which had been produced in Mary's mind by the sudden destruction of her youthful ideal in the person of this (as she now thought) dreadful man made her perhaps unjust to Ralph. He came towards the sundial, however, in the full revelation of the grey light with a smile of self-satisfaction on his face which strengthened the supposition. He had a habitual lurch in his walk, and his large, broad figure was made all the broader and more loose and large in the light suit of large checks which he wore. He had a flaming red necktie to accentuate the redness of his broad face. Mary felt with a shudder that there was reason in Letitia's horror. To let this man be seen by a fastidious, aristocratic, cynical old gentleman, natural critic and antagonist of his brother's wife—oh, no!—she understood Letitia now. If Will or Harry should come home like that! But the idea was too horrible to be entertained for a moment. Ralph came up to

the sundial—she had hidden herself behind a clump of lilac bushes to watch him—with that smirk upon his face and a swing and swagger of conquest about him. He leant upon it, arranging himself in a triumphant pose to wait. Then he began to whistle, then he called "Hi!" and "Here!" under his breath. After a minute he became impatient and whistled more loudly, and detaching himself from the sundial looked round. "Hi, Mary!" he cried. "Hallo, my lass!" He caught sight at last of her dark dress among the lilacs, and turned round with a loud snap of his fingers. "Oh, there you are!" he cried, "and, by Jove, right you are, Mary, my girl. It's too open here."

He strolled across the grass towards her with a swing and a lurch of his great person more triumphant than ever. "Right you are," he said, with a laugh. "It's a deal too open. I like your sense, Mary, my dear."

Mary hurried forward, feeling herself crimson with shame, and met him in the middle of the glade. "It can't be too open for what I have to say to you," she said: then added most inconsiderately, "We had surely better go back to the house. We shall be less remarked there."

"I don't think you know what you mean," he said, thrusting his arm through hers, and holding it as though to lean upon her. "That's a woman all over. Gives you a meeting and then's frightened to keep it. I've been a rover, I don't deny it, and I know their ways. You like me all the better, now don't you, for knowing all your little ways?"

He held her arm, drawing her close to him, and bending over her, surrounding the prim and gentle Mary, fastidious old maid as she was, with that atmosphere of stale tobacco and half-exhausted spirit which breathes from some men. He reminded her of the sensations she had experienced in passing the village public-house, but she was not passing it—she was involved in it now, surrounded by its sickening breath. Every kind of humiliation and horror was in that contact to Mary. She tried in vain to draw herself out of his hold.

"Ralph, oh, please let me go. I have got a message for you. That was why I asked you to come here."

He laughed, and leaned over her more than ever—disgusting more than words could say to this shrinking woman, whom he believed in his heart he was treating as women loved best to be

treated. "Come, now," he said, "Mary, my love, don't go on pretending. As if I wasn't up to all these dodges! Say honest you wanted a word with your old sweetheart without Tisch spying on you with them sharp eyes of hers. And how she's gone off! She's as ugly as a toad—and stuck up! I daresay she'd think her brother was demeaning himself to the governess—eh? You're the governess, ain't you?" Mr. Ravelstone said.

"I am not the governess; and if either you or she think I would demean myself——" Mary's habitual gentleness made her all the more fiery and impassioned now—the fierceness of a dove. She disengaged herself from his hold with the vehemence of her sudden movement. She stood panting beyond his reach and addressed him. "Don't come a step nearer! I have a message to you from Tisch. Can't you see, if you have any sense at all, that she cannot want you here?"

He gave her a strange and angry look. "What do you mean? Tisch—my own sister! You've gone out of your mind, Mary Hill."

"It is you that have gone out of your mind. Look at her house, and the way she lives. Look at her husband, a gentleman. Mr. Parke may be stupid, but he is a gentleman. Didn't you understand last night how she was feeling? What has a man like you to do here? Why, at Grocombe—even at Grocombe they would feel it; and fancy what it must be here."

"What would they feel at Grocombe?" said Ralph, growing doubly red, and looking at her with a threatening air.

Mary paused. To hurt any one was impossible to her—she could not do it. She looked at him; at the droop of his features, from which the jaunty air of complacency had gone, and at his debasement and deterioration, which were so evident in her eyes, not to be mistaken: and her courage failed her. "Oh! Ralph," she said, "there is a difference. It's not only money, or the want of money. You know there is a difference. She wants you to go away."

"Who wants me to go away?"

His countenance grew darker and darker. He looked at her as if he would have struck her. It was she—his old playfellow—who was thus humiliating him to the earth.

Mary grew more and more compunctious. "It is her way of looking at things," she said, faltering. "She is not like you, or



me. She thinks so much of what people say. You came to dinner," said Mary, suddenly thinking of something that might break the blow, "in your velveteen coat."

An air of relief came over Ralph's face. He laughed loudly, yet with evident ease. "So that's what it is!" he said. "You're ashamed of my clo'es, you two young women. Well, I must say women are the meanest beggars I ever saw, and I've met all sorts. Ashamed of my clo'es!"

Mary was relieved beyond measure that he should so take it. She drew a long breath. "It's so much thought of in this kind of a house," she said; "and they are expecting Lord Frogmore. Oh, Ralph, don't take it amiss. Letitia is not very strong. She has, perhaps, been spoilt a little, always getting her own way; and she has no room to give her brother-in-law. They get everything from him," she added hurriedly. "He is so rich: oh! Ralph, how can I say it? I would not for the world hurt your feelings. She wants you to go—while Lord Frogmore is here."

"She has no room to give her brother-in-law, and she prefers my room to my company, eh?" he said, with a harsh laugh. "I'm not good enough to meet that old fogey in my velvet coat. Why I thought velvet was all the fashion. They said so in the papers, Mary."

"Not in the evening, Ralph," said Mary, with a sense of duplicity which made her turn away her face.

"Not in the evening, eh? I suppose this fellow must have swallow-tails? Well, it's a poor thing to snub your brother for, ain't it, Mary? You wouldn't do that to a brother of yours."

"I don't think I should, Ralph, but then Letitia has married into a—grand family, and she has her husband's people to think of."

"By George!" he cried, "her husband's people! and me her own brother." Mary could not refrain from one glance of sympathy—which he caught in the momentary raising of her eyes, and which was so kind yet timid that he burst into a sudden laugh.

"Mary," he said, endeavouring again to put his arm through hers, "you've never got a husband, my lass. Tell me how it is: for you were always a great deal prettier than Tisch, with nice little ways——"

"Don't Ralph—I prefer to walk alone, if you please."

"You're afraid to be seen, you little goose!" he said. "I know your dodges. Come, tell us how it was. If there was one lass in Grocombe that was sure to get a husband I should have said it was you. Come, Mary, tell! I think I know the reason why."

Mary looked at him with a little air which she intended to check impertinence, but which had no effect on Ralph. "I should think it was enough—that I preferred to stay as I am—without any other reason," she said.

"Oh, tell that to——any one that will believe it," cried Ralph. "I know women a little better than that. I'll tell you what it was, and deny it, Mary, if you can. You were waiting for an old sweetheart to come home. Ah, now, I've made you jump. That's your little secret. As if I didn't know it the moment I set eyes on you, my dear."

"You are quite, quite wrong—whatever you mean—and I don't know what you mean," said Mary, very angry. It was not true: and yet yesterday, before he had shown himself, there was just so much possibility in the supposition that it might have been true.

He laughed in his triumph over her, and sense of manly superiority—the sweetheart for whom she had waited, but who had no immediate intention of rewarding her for her constancy.

"We haven't a chance, you know," he said, "my dear, for being as faithful as that: for you see a man has women after him wherever he goes. Oh, I've been a rover, Mary, I'll not deny it. A fellow like me can't help himself. I've never married, and you may think if you like it is because I hadn't forgotten you; but I've had plenty more ready to fling themselves at my head: so you mustn't be surprised if I can't make up my mind to buy the ring all at once."

"Will you tell me your answer for Letitia?" cried Mary, with a crimson countenance, looking him as steadily as she could in the face.

"An answer for Tisch—bother Tisch! If you want an answer for yourself, my dear——"

"Will you leave Greenpark to-day?" cried Mary, with lamb-like fury. "Will you go away directly—this moment? I'll go and tell the footman to put up your things for you, Mr. Ravelstone."

Mrs. Parke wishes you to go—directly. Do you hear what I say?"

"Why, then, what a little hussy you are—as bad as Tisch herself. And what have I done? You could not expect me to have the ring in my pocket——"

"It doesn't matter," said Mary, "if she does kill herself or if they all kill themselves. I will not stand to be insulted one moment longer. Stay if you please in a place where they hate you and scorn you, and will not speak a word to you. Oh, stay if you please and shame them! But you can't shame me, for I have nothing to do with you; only I hope I shall never see you or hear your horrid name again."

She turned from him and fled across the grass and along the garden paths with the swiftness of a girl of sixteen, and with an energy of scorn which the most complacent of men could not have mistaken. Ralph Ravelstone stood looking after her with a face full of amazement. He did not understand it. A woman of Mary's age is supposed by men of his class to be very open to any overture, and not too fastidious as to the terms of it. Besides he had meant to be an amiable conqueror; not to be disrespectful at all. He turned slowly after her with his countenance a great deal longer than when he had first approached. The reality of this repulse struck him more than anything she could have said. He was in his way an *homme à bonnes fortunes*, not used to being repulsed by the kind of women he had known. Mary was something different, something finer though she was only an old maid. His self-confidence was not very deep, and in the bottom of his heart perhaps he suspected that he was not the most creditable of suitors or of brothers. He stood pulling his big beard and looking after the hurrying figure, which never slackened pace or looked back, till it had disappeared into the house. And then he walked slowly after, with certain words coming back to his ears. "Stay in a place where they hate you and scorn you!" He remembered how his sister had jumped out of his arms, how she had looked at him with staring eyes. "By Jove!" he said to himself, quickening his pace, and strode into the house and rang the bell in his room (he was not much accustomed to bells) till he pulled it down, filling the house with the furious tinkling and bringing the footman and a stray housemaid from different corners of the house, stumbling up the un-

accustomed stairs—for Mary's room was in a remote corner of the house, and Miss Hill's bell did not ring three times in a year.

## CHAPTER IX.

"My mistress, sir, is too poorly to see any one."

"Do you know who I am?" said Ralph.

He stood swelling out his big chest in front of the polite, imperturbable figure in black, which made the bushman's large check still more emphatic.

"Well, sir," said Saunders, with a deprecating smile, "I am sorry to say as I did not catch the name."

"I am her brother, you fool," said Ralph. "Go back and say that it's her brother, and I must see her before I go. What do you stand there for, gaping? Go back and tell her I can't go without seeing her. Don't you hear?"

"I hear very well, sir," said Saunders, "but I make no doubt, sir, my mistress knew who you was, though I didn't quite catch the name."

"Where's Mr. Parke?" said Ralph.

"He has gone out, sir, with the other gentlemen. I understand his lordship is expected this evening," said Mr. Saunders, with the importance such an intimation deserved.

"And who's his lordship?" thundered Ralph.

"His lordship, sir, is master's brother, Viscount Frogmore. He is an old gentleman, and we're the heir presumptive in this house."

Ralph was considerably struck by this intimation, which had not affected him when Mary conveyed the news. An old viscount to whom his sister was heir presumptive must be an important person. He was not very learned in, or else he had forgotten, the terms and conditions of English rank. He had heard indeed that Tisch had made a great marriage, but not much more about it, and indeed it had sincerely been more a natural desire to see his sister than any hope of allying himself to the exalted personages to whom she belonged which had moved the ranchman. He stood stroking down his big hand in all the majesty of his large checks and burly person, but with a look of great perplexity on his countenance. What should he do? As a matter of fact, his irruption into the drawing-room on the night before, and the

sudden sight of Tisch in all her glory, had startled him greatly. His confusion had turned into noise and bravado, as confusion and a sense of inappropriateness often do. And then he had been excited and his head turned by the attention his odd stories had received and the civility of the gentlemen who drew him out. Altogether there had been a whirl of events, which, in conjunction with the case of bottles in the smoking-room and other potations which had led the way, had dazed Ralph. But now he came to himself. He realized that he was not wanted, with an acuteness which wounded the poor fellow more than such a rash personage could be supposed to be capable of being wounded. He stood and stared at the butler while this process was going on in his mind. He was very nearly taking that functionary into his confidence, telling him what a trick Letitia had played him, and what a strange reception this was for a man newly come home. He ended his musing, however, by a sudden burst of his big laughter in the face of Saunders.

"Don't stand and stare like a stuck pig," he said, "but go and order the dogcart, or whatever you've got, for I'm going off. You didn't suppose I'd stay when I'm not wanted, did you? You're used to sending fellows off when they're not wanted—ain't you, old Tuppenny?" he added, giving Saunders a poke in his ribs.

The laughter and the roughness which made Saunders think missis's brother an affable, if not very fine gentleman, were both the product of the confusion in Ralph's mind, rather than of any desire to expend high spirits in a joke. He took out a sovereign from his pocket and twanged it through the air into the astonished butler's palm, which somehow, surprised though Saunders was found itself open to receive the unimportant gift. Ralph intended to show his solemn antagonist that a man who would toss about sovereigns like that was not a man who was in want of anything from Mrs. Parke. But it is doubtful how far he succeeded. Saunders had a profound acquaintance with the ways of men about the world, and his judgment was not that it was rich men who threw their sovereigns about. But he did not in the least object to have pieces of gold flung at him, and, indeed, liked the sound of them twanging through the air.

Ralph, however, was in no hurry to go. He watched the footman strapping up his much-used portmanteau, and intimated

that he thought he might as well have some lunch before he left; and he went out and displayed himself in front of the house, making a promenade up and down with his chest thrown well out, and his big footsteps making the gravel fly. He was not aware that Letitia watched him from her window, but he hoped as much, and that it was gall to her to see him in the way of every visitor who might arrive. The first who arrived, indeed, was no visitor, but the representative of the house in the person of Master Marmaduke, a little fellow of five, dressed in one of those childish suits which make a child look as if it had gone to seed in the upper parts of its person, and was supported by the most incomplete thin stalks below. He was not so firmly planted upon his little legs as he ought to have been, but his shoulders had thus the air of being broad and strong. He returned from his walk with his nurse while Ralph was taking this little stroll in preparation for the luncheon which was being prepared for him in the dining-room. Little Duke went up to the intruder, whom he had not seen, with the air of the master of the house, seven times doubled in dignity and consequence. "Were you wanting anything here?" he asked, as if he had been his own father; but John Parke never filled the *rôle* so well.

"Oh, Master Duke," said the nurse, dismayed, "the gentleman is staying in the house!"

Duke surveyed the bushman from head to foot with a child's disapproval of a type unknown.

"Hold your tongue," he said, "and let me alone. He's not staying in the house! Why, I've never seen him till this moment and he's not like anybody I know."

"What's your name, little man?" said Ralph. "Come here and shake hands, and I'll give you a bit of Australian gold, my boy, to know your uncle by."

Duke planted his thin little legs very wide apart and stared. He liked the idea of that bit of gold without any special certainty as to what it was, but he did not approach too close to a man whose appearance did not satisfy his perceptions. "I don't know you," he said—"I don't know you a bit. I never saw any one the least like you. Do you mean that you're my uncle? What are bits of Australian gold like?"

"They are very much like sovereigns," said Ralph.

Duke's legs involuntarily brought him a little nearer. "You



are not like the rest of the gentlemen," said Duke. "You are very queerly dressed. I don't think you can be my uncle. But I should like to see the Australian gold."

"Australian" was a big mouthful for such a small boy. He got over it in syllables and with an effort.

"Look here," said Ralph, repeating the manœuvre which he had tried with Saunders. Only he twanged the sovereign into the air with his thumb and caught it this time in the palm of his own hand. Duke watched the coin with the greatest interest and drew near to look at it, but did not put forth his own little hand.

"It's just money," he said, in a tone of half disappointment, half contempt. Then he added, "Should I have that to spend if —if you gave it me, you know?"

"Oh, yes, you should have it to spend. You shall have it when you come and shake hands with your uncle," said Ralph.

The boy came nearer, then paused again and said, "I'm sure you can't be Lord Frogmore."

"Why not?" said Ralph, with his big laugh.

Duke looked at him critically and seriously.

"Because you don't look like a —, because I don't think you're a —." What he wanted to say was that his new acquaintance was not a gentleman. Duke thought he was like the keepers. One of the grooms in his Sunday clothes had very much the air of this strange person who caught the sovereign in his hand in that clever way. But little Duke did not like to suggest, looking up into a big man's face, that he was not a gentleman. So he stopped and stared, almost forgetting the Australian gold in this perplexity, which was an experience not at all familiar to him.

"Not like a lord?" said Ralph. "How do you know? I don't suppose you know many lords, do you, little man? I might be a duke for aught you know."

The little boy stared again, less assured. He had not been used to think of lords as a different species, but he had never known a duke. It was well within the limits of possibility that a duke might be like a gamekeeper. The species was unknown to little Marmaduke Parke.

"Are you a duke?" he asked with much seriousness and eyes very keen and sharp in the study of the new species.

Ralph burst into a big laugh. "No," he said, "my little man, but I'm your uncle. Not Lord Frogmore, but one of the other side. I'm your uncle Ralph. Come and shake hands."

Duke advanced slowly, as it were under protest, and at last ventured to place a little soft hand in the comparatively monstrous palm of Ralph, who squeezed the sovereign into it with such energy that the little boy cried out, and, unaccustomed to such gratuities, let the coin drop upon the path. But Duke picked it up with a practical sense which did him credit, and turned it over with eyes in which awe and eagerness were combined. He recognized the Queen's head, but there was something about it which struck him as unusual. Unfortunately he could not yet read. He began to spell A—u—s—

"That's Australia," cried the newly recognized uncle.

Duke, somewhat suspicious, handed the coin to nurse. "Oh, Master Duke, how can you?" cried that anxious woman. "A beautiful sovereign! and you've never thanked the kind gentleman. I don't know, sir," she said, courtesying to Ralph, "if his mamma would let him take it, for my mistress is very particular—but—"

"Not take it from his uncle?" roared Ralph.

The discussion was interrupted by the sound of a step upon the gravel, which made them all look round. The new-comer was an old gentleman, with snow-white hair but a ruddy wholesome complexion, and the round ripe face which reminds one of a winter apple. "Frosty but kindly" was the look of the small twinkling eyes, the carefully-trimmed whisker, the smoothly-shaven chin and upper lip. The old gentleman was of short stature compared with Ralph, his neatness, his perfect cleanness, his well-brushed, well-dressed, carefully-preserved look all showing to greater advantage beside the big figure of the bushman in his big checks. He walked with great activity and alertness—like a young man, people said—but there was indeed a special energy almost demonstrative in his activity which betrayed the fact that it was something of a wonder that he should be active. He flourished his stick perhaps a little to make it apparent that he had no need of it. He eyed the group very curiously as he walked past them to the door, and then it was that he heard Ralph's cry, "Not from his uncle?" At the sound of those words he turned round quickly and came back.

"Eh," he said, "his uncle? Who is this little fellow, my good woman? Marmaduke Parke? Then, my boy, I'm your uncle too."

Duke looked at this new claimant without the hesitation which he had shown to Ralph. There was no doubt on the most superficial examination that this was a gentleman. He took off his little hat and held out his little hand.

"How do you do?" said the little boy. "Mamma is poorly, and papa is out, and I'm just come back from my walk; but if you will come in, please, Saunders will know what to do."

When Ralph gave vent to the great roar of a laugh which seemed to make a sort of storm in the air above the heads at once of Lord Frogmore and of little Marmaduke, there was more than merriment in that outburst. The bushman felt the distinction which the little boy had made, though it was only a very little boy that had made it. He assumed an additional swagger in consequence. "I'm on the other side, my lord," he said, "for I presume you're Lord Frogmore. I'm Ralph Ravelstone, the brother of the missis; but we're on different tacks, you and me. She ain't at all proud of her brother, I'm sorry to say, though I want nothing from them—not a brass farthing. So I'm clearing out of the way."

"Ah!" said Lord Frogmore. He added after a moment, "You will not, of course, expect me to interfere—people know their own concerns best."

"Interfere!" said Ralph. "I never thought of that. Tisch knows her own mind, and there's nobody I ever heard of could make her change it. Oh, I'm going. It's not good enough to hang on here in a bit of a country place like this for anything I'll get from Tisch. Besides, I want nothing from them. I've just come from the bush with dollars enough once in a way. I came out of kindness. If she don't want me I can do without her, and that's all I've got to say."

To this Lord Frogmore made no reply, save by bowing his head politely, as to a conclusion of which he might approve indeed, but which left nothing to be said. But Ralph stood swaying his big person about, not knowing how to get himself off the scene, and indeed with a sentiment of elation in the unexpected and unaccustomed felicity of talking to a lord.

"You see, my lord," he said, "through her"—and he jerked

his thumb over his shoulder—"we are a kind of connections, you and me."

"Oh!" said Lord Frogmore gravely. "We are a kind of connections?"

"Yes," said Ralph. "I'm very glad to make your acquaintance. This little beggar here is nephew to us both. It's droll if you think of it," added Ralph, stopping to laugh, "that he should be nephew to you—and also to me."

"Perhaps it is a little—droll, as you say," said Lord Frogmore. Fortunately he did not think it was his own age that Ralph referred to. He thought it was indeed a wonderful thing that he and this wild bushranger, or whoever he was, should stand in the same relationship to any one. At this moment the footman appeared at the hall door, with a look of intelligence addressed to Ralph. The bushman started and changed into a tone of almost ostentatious hospitality. "My lunch is ready," he said; "there's sure to be enough for two. I hope, my lord, you'll come and have a share."

Lord Frogmore had left the railway at a different station from that which the Parkes ordinarily used. He was proud of his walking powers and liked to show that he was as able for exertion as much younger men. Indeed, it was his delight to surprise people who sent carriages for him and were anxious to save such an old gentleman fatigue by appearing suddenly at their door as he had done now. But so much exercise required exceptional support, and he felt the want of a glass of wine. He received Ralph's invitation with amusement, but not without pleasure. "Don't you think," he said, "that we had better wait for some of the people of the house?"

"Don't be shy, my lord," said Ralph. "Why, we're all people of the house."

Little Duke then stood forth, feeling the call of duty. "Mamma's poorly upstairs—and papa is out shooting," he said. "But I'm here. And it's me the next after papa."

"Oh, it's you the next, little man?"

"Yes," said Duke, without guile—"first there's you, don't you know, if you're Uncle Frogmore—and when you're dead, papa—and when papa's dead, me—I'll be Lord Frogmore some day," said the boy. "And then I shan't want your Australian sovereign, you, uncle—man—for I don't know your name."

"Oh," said the old gentleman gravely, "so you'll be Lord Frogmore?"

## CHAPTER X.

LETITIA was in her room, by the open window, wrapped in a warm dressing-gown. It was rather cold, though the day was bright, to sit by an open window; but she was watching for her brother's departure, and very eager, thinking he would never go. She had been an unseen witness, behind the curtain, of his meeting with her boy, and had partially overheard the conversation that had passed; that is to say, she had heard all Ralph's part of it, but not Duke's little voice in reply. Letitia was more impatient than words can say of this encounter, and trembled with nervous anxiety and helpless eagerness. But she said to herself that Frogmore at least would not come till the afternoon, and all the other gentlemen were out, and the coast clear. No one arriving at a country house to pay a visit ever came before the afternoon—five o'clock, that was the earliest moment possible for an arrival. She said this to herself with a presentiment which she could not overcome, but for which she reproached herself, declaring that it was nonsense, nonsense! audibly in the turmoil of her excitement. Why should Frogmore arrive at an hour when nobody arrived, merely to distract her, Letitia? Things are very perverse sometimes, but not so perverse as that. She said to herself that she was a fool for dwelling upon such a thought, and that her nervousness about Ralph was absurd. She dared not show herself at the window lest he should see her and insist upon an interview; and from where she sat she could see only by a hurried glance now and then, so that she remained unaware of the full horror of what was happening until she heard a third voice, not familiar, but which after a moment she recognized, and which was to her as the clap of doom. Frogmore! She pulled the curtain aside, forgetting her precautions in the excess of her excitement; but no one of the group saw her: they were too much occupied with themselves. Lord Frogmore had not appeared much in his brother's domestic circle. Since her marriage Letitia had seen him only during the three or four days' visit which John and she paid once a year to the head of the house. He went abroad every winter, taking care of himself—as if his life were of so much importance!—and had visits to pay in

the visiting season which no doubt he liked better than going to see his brother ; at all events they had met very little, and Letitia was not so very familiar with his voice that she should recognize it at once. But even before she recognized she divined. Of course it was Frogmore ; who should it be but the one person in the world whom she was the least desirous to see ? She was so overwhelmed by the thought that the meeting which she so much wished to avoid had taken place, that the heart which seemed to beat in her throat and the fluttering of all her nerves prevented her from hearing what they said, until the sound of steps made her again pull back the curtain, and she watched the group moving leisurely towards the dining-room. Ralph was doing the honours, he was inviting Lord Frogmore in to luncheon, and little Duke, whom she would have liked to whip, had abandoned his nurse and was walking solemnly between the big bushman and the little old gentleman. Oh ! how she would have liked to whip Duke ! It was the one possible outlet for her feelings which Letitia could think of in the immense irritation that possessed her in view of this insufferable combination—Ralph doing the honours of John Parke's house to Lord Frogmore. If she had only been wise enough to pursue it—to listen to her own presentiment, to have been on the spot herself and prepared for whatever might happen ! Sometimes it is highly advantageous to adopt the female expedient of a headache, to find yourself unable to come downstairs on some particular morning when there may happen to be any embarrassing business. But sometimes this expedient is not so successful. Letitia repented bitterly the employment of it. She had been determined not to see her brother—to show him in the most decided way that her house was a place to which he was not to come. But how could she ever have anticipated that Lord Frogmore would appear at such an unlikely hour, and that it should be Ralph—Ralph of all people in the world—that would receive him, and do the honours of the house to him ! After a pause of rage and perplexity, Letitia rang the bell, and when her maid appeared sent her somewhat imperiously for Mary Hill. "Go and tell Miss Hill I want to see her. Tell her—I mean ask her," said Letitia, with a civility born of necessity, "to come directly, please." Mrs. Parke paused again to think which would be most impressive ; whether to begin to dress with the air of being quite unable for the



exertion, or to fling herself down upon the sofa in the lassitude of the dressing-gown, unable to move. She decided for the first of these processes. It would touch Mary more to see her preparing to do her duty at any price, than merely to witness the collapse which, perhaps, she would not have such complete faith in as was desirable. Accordingly Letitia rose. She pulled out the first dress that came to hand in her wardrobe. Not to diminish the effect, she waited until Mary might be supposed to be approaching. She then hurried out of her dressing-gown, and began to put on her usual clothes, and was found by Mary, on her hurried entry, half fallen upon the sofa, panting and breathless, fastening, with hands that trembled and seemed hardly capable of performing their functions, her under-garments. Mary made an outcry of surprise when she entered the room, and the maid who followed made a dart at her mistress with a scream—"Madame, you're not fit to dress or go downstairs."

"What can I do," said Letitia, with little pants between each two words, "when I am so much wanted—when I must—I must?"

"Oh! what is the matter, Letitia? Can't I do it for you?" said Mary, in her impulsive way.

"You may go away, Felicia. Miss Hill will help me if I want any help. Oh, Mary, don't you know what is the matter? Shut the door after that prying woman. They all want to have their noses in everything. It's Ralph," said Mrs. Parke, throwing herself back on the sofa, as in despair. "He has not gone away after all, and Frogmore has come—oh, Mary! when I begged and implored you upon my knees to get him away, and not to let him meet Frogmore."

Letitia threw herself back on her sofa while in the act of tying a pair of necessary strings. Her hands were trembling very perceptibly. She dropped the strings and flung her arms over her head in an outburst of tragical distress. Mary, on her part, had retired in tears from her interview with Ralph, and had shut herself into the little back room which was all in the present crowded state of the house that she could call her own, with much real agitation and distress. But when she saw Letitia press those conspicuously trembling fingers on her face the sight of her friend's trouble was more than she could bear

"Oh, Letitia," she said, "I am so sorry for you—what can I

do? If there is anything I can do tell me. I did speak to him. I begged him to go away, and he said he would. Oh, if there is anything more I can do I will do it. But don't kill yourself; don't take on so dreadfully. Don't, oh don't think so much of it, Letitia: Ralph——"

"Don't mention his name," cried Mrs. Parke; "never shall I think of him as a brother. Do you think I've no pride and no feeling for my family? How would you like it if your black sheep—if the one that was no credit—turned up just when you wanted to put your best foot foremost? Oh, Mary Hill! I don't blame you, but he never would have come but for you."

"You are quite mistaken there," said Mary, with a dignity in which there was some touch of irritation too. "And I am glad to say there is no black sheep in my——" Her voice sank as she added this, and a compunction seized her and broke the sentence short, for, to be sure, the black sheep in the family is the misfortune and not the fault of the rest, and Mary thought it was ungenerous to remind Letitia of her own better fortune. She went on, with a little eagerness, to conceal this error. "If I can do anything, Letitia—but I don't know what I can do."

"No, nor I," said Letitia, but then she said, with a softened voice, "You might go down and see what they're doing. I can't be ready in a moment; it takes some time to get into one's dress when one is all of a tremble as I am. You might go down and stand between Frogmore and Ralph. Oh, I know you could do it. And there is Duke, the little wretch, listening to all Ralph's stories. Send him up to me straight off."

"I—go down! But I don't know Lord Frogmore—and Ralph."

"I hope you know Ralph at least. Mary Hill! you told me this moment you would do anything—but the moment I name the one thing, the only thing I ask of you——"

Mary wrung her hands, but turned away and went downstairs. She had never been used to resist when anything was asked of her. It had been her part in the world always to do what was insisted upon, what it was necessary to do. She went downstairs, almost counting the steps in her reluctance, hoping that Letitia might relent and call her back, yet knowing very well that nothing would make Letitia relent. After her conversation this morning with Ralph, to go back, as it seemed, voluntarily into the room where he

was—to go, as he would think, on purpose to have a last word with him—was intolerable to her. Her natural modesty and reticence were intensified by the primness and old maidenly scruples which had come upon her with the advancing years and made her pride more sensitive and her fear of compromising herself more great. And before Lord Frogmore, who would think—what might he not think? Poor Mary went slowly across the hall. Oh, if Letitia only knew what it was to put such a commission upon her! But Letitia had such different ways of thinking—Letitia might perhaps have found it no trial at all.

When Mary went into the dining-room, where Ralph was making an excellent meal, and telling stories of the bush which delighted his little audience, her colour was heightened; her dove's eyes were clear and humid, almost with tears in them. She had seldom in her life looked so well, though of this she was quite unconscious. Her great reluctance gave her an air of dignity as well as that of duty painfully fulfilled. She went in very slowly, holding her head higher than usual, though it was a sense of humiliation and not pride that so moved her. Lord Frogmore had been persuaded to join the bushman in his luncheon, having evidently been assured that this was the luncheon of the house, Letitia not being well enough to be out of her room. Ralph was seated at his meal with his mouth full, talking as he munched, and praising the excellent cold beef as he talked. Cold beef for Lord Frogmore! Saunders indeed had endeavoured to interfere, to explain that the family lunch was an hour later, that this was only for Mr. Ravelstone because of his train, and that to set cold beef before the distinguished guest was the last thing in the world that would have been contemplated. But Lord Frogmore had paid no attention, and sat quite pleased, mincing his cold beef into small morsels and laughing at Ralph's stories. Little Duke had clambered up upon his high chair and sat between the two men, turning his small head from one to another as they talked with great attention, with the precocious civility of a host paying solemn attention to his guests. Duke did not laugh at the Australian's jokes because he did not understand them, but he gazed at Lord Frogmore, who did, and looked from one to another with a curious consciousness of the inferiority of those mysteriously excited persons who gesticulated and declaimed and laughed and applauded to his own small gravity and dignity, something like that which we can

imagine rising in the consciousness of an intelligent animal at sight of human eccentricities. Duke thought it very funny that they should laugh so much. What was there to laugh about? Ralph sprang up from the table, making a great noise, and with his knife and fork in his hands, when Mary appeared. "Hallo!" he cried. "Here we have begun, like a couple of ill-bred pigs, without thinking of Miss Hill. A plate and napkin for Miss Hill, and look sharp, you there! What can you think of us to begin without you? I give you my word I never gave it a thought."

"Please sit down," said Mary. "I want nothing. I only came—that is, Letitia sent me—to see that you had everything you wanted, to see that there was a proper lunch——"

"Letitia's very kind, but she might have come herself. There's excellent cold beef—isn't it excellent, my Lord Frogmore? They think it's not good enough for you, evidently, but it's plenty good enough for me. I prefer it to all the kickshaws in the world. Sit down and try a bit, Mary; it'll do you good."

"Oh, thank you," said Mary, drawing nervously away. "Duke, you are to go upstairs to your mother. Oh, please don't disturb yourself. I would rather not sit down, please. Letitia was afraid that you were not served in time, that you might be kept too late for your train."

"Letitia's very anxious about my train," cried Ralph, with a big laugh, but he caught Mary's alarmed look at Saunders, who stood very demurely behind Lord Frogmore with his ears wide open to everything. Saunders scented a mystery, and was very anxious to fathom it. He scented something much more mysterious, as was natural, than anything that existed. "But sit down, Mary, and join the festive board," continued the bushman; "a meal's twice a meal when there's a lady present. Don't you think so, Lord Frogmore?"

Lord Frogmore had risen up with old-fashioned courtesy when he saw Mary, and stood without taking any part in the invitation, awaiting what she intended to do, with his hand on the back of his chair. Lord Frogmore, as ill-fortune would have it, was seeing the house of the Parkes, which was indeed the most orderly and well-governed of houses, in the strangest light—a light that was not at all a true one, though he had no means of knowing it. The wild, bearded brother from the backwoods, the gentle, somewhat prim, dependent lady, puzzled him very much.

Miss Hill he thought a much pleasanter type of woman than his sister-in-law, but who was she? Probably the governess. But then the governess would not be on such familiar terms with the brother. The old gentleman stood with true civility, doing nothing to increase the embarrassment of the poor lady, poor thing, who did not know what to do.

"The dog-cart, sir, is at the door," said Saunders solemnly, "and if I might make so bold, there is just twenty minutes to get the train."

Ralph put down his knife and fork. "I should have liked another bit of that nice cold beef," he said; "but since you're all in such a hurry——. Little 'un, you can go and tell your mother I'm off. It'll be a satisfaction to her. And, Mary, don't forget what I said."

"I don't remember," said Mary, "that you said anything particular. Ra—Mr. Ravelstone—I will tell Letitia—anything you wish me to say."

"Then tell her," cried Ralph, "I don't care that!" with a snap of his big fingers. He paused, however, with a thought of Saunders and the proprieties, and burst into another laugh. "You can tell Tisch that the cold beef's capital, and that I've enjoyed my luncheon—and the best of company," he said. "Good-bye, my lord, and good-bye, little 'un. Mary, is this how we're to part, you and me?"

Mary wrung her fingers out of his grasp. "I will give Letitia your message," she said.

"You'll come and see me off, at least. Poor Mary, don't be so down because there's strangers here. Come out and see me go."

She looked involuntarily in her distress towards the courteous old gentleman, who stood quietly observant with his hand on the back of his chair. Lord Frogmore did not understand the meaning of the appeal in her eyes—whether she wished him to go away; whether she looked to him for protection. He took out his watch, however, on the chance that it was the latter, and held it up to the departing guest.

"Well, good-bye to you all!" shouted Ralph, thus driven by moral force to the door.

"I fear the gentleman will be late," said Lord Frogmore in his precise voice.

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Mary, clasping her hands. She

listened while the dash of the dog-cart from the door, as Ralph sprang into it, was audible. "He has been long absent from home," she said. "He has got out of the ways of—English life. Mrs. Parke was rather afraid——. She was so sorry not to be downstairs to receive you. She is dressing now to be ready for luncheon, and begged me——"

"It was quite unnecessary; I found him very amusing. And I was glad to make acquaintance with this little fellow." Lord Frogmore put his hand on Duke's head, who had not obeyed the call to his mother. "He is—your charge, perhaps?"

"Oh, no," cried Mary, with a blush. "I am only a friend staying in the house."

"I beg you a thousand pardons," said Lord Frogmore.

## CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Mrs. Parke came downstairs she exhausted herself in civilities to her old brother-in-law, and in apologies that she had not been there to receive him. She had been much upset, she allowed, by the appearance of her long-lost brother quite unexpectedly, on the previous night, a brother who had given the family great anxiety, and whom it was most necessary to send home at once for family reasons. The explanation was very well given and very plausible, but there was one thing upon which Letitia insisted too much, and that was the fact that she had not expected Lord Frogmore until the afternoon. Her imperfect breeding and still more imperfect taste made her insist upon this with an emphasis which conveyed a reproach to Lord Frogmore for his premature arrival. He made her a very serious apology, though with a twinkle in his keen old eyes which Letitia (though so clever) was not clever enough to detect.

"It was very thoughtless on my part," said Lord Frogmore. "I will be more considerate on future occasions. It is of course ridiculous to arrive in the morning, when the mistress of the house has of course a thousand engagements. I will remember the hint you give me to regulate my future conduct." Mary, who was present, was very uneasy at this covert satire, but Letitia did not perceive it.

"I am sure I did not mean that you were not most welcome at any time, Frogmore—I hope neither John nor I need to say



that—but only that it is more usual later, and that I was not prepared. Nothing would have prevented me from being down in time, not if I had died for it, had I been prepared.”

“I can only be most happy that you were not prepared, for what would I have said for myself, or what would John have said to me, had a life so precious been placed in danger by my indiscretion?” said Lord Frogmore, with a bow. He was a little formal in his mode of speech and in his civilities, which had an old school deference about them quite unknown to the new generation. There is nothing easier than to give a dangerous scratch under the cover of that velvet glove of supreme good manners, but it takes a delicate perception to perceive sarcasm, and Letitia did not find it out.

Lord Frogmore on his side felt himself much more amused than he had expected by the reception he had met with. He belonged to a class perhaps more frequent nowadays than in former times, the class to which the follies of its fellow-creatures are more amusing than anything else that can be met with in the world. The old lord expected to pay a very dull duty visit to his brother, whom he esteemed as a good-hearted blockhead, and the sharp little underbred woman who was his wife. He had scarcely hoped to be amused, even by Letitia, whose little pretensions he believed himself to have fully fathomed and seen through, and he did not expect to find amusement in the society to be found in their house. It was a quite unexpected felicity to be received so unexpectedly by the big bushman, with his stories of adventure, and the unexplained family complication coincident with his presence and the evident desire to get rid of him shown by all the house. Mary, too, who was not the governess, and who, under her little middle-aged primness, was an observer like himself, and saw what he meant when Mrs. John remained quite impervious, interested the old lord. There was something to see and note where he had expected nothing, something to find out in the perfectly *banal* household. The old gentleman's little keen eyes quickened and sparkled, and that wonderful interest in human life which is nowhere so strong as among those who have reached its furthest limit awoke in him with a grateful hope of satisfaction. In the midst of this, which was on the whole agreeable, there was one little prick which had been given quite unintentionally by the most innocent hand, yet which he could not forget, notwith-

standing all his philosophy. It was what little Duke had said when he had welcomed his uncle with immediate recognition of what was due to him. "First, there's you," Duke had said, "and when you're dead, papa, and when papa's dead, me—I'll be Lord Frogmore some day." This was quite true and quite innocent, and meant no harm; but Lord Frogmore could not get it out of his mind. He had of course been aware since John Parke was born that he was to be his own successor, heir presumptive, as the Peerage said; and of course little Marmaduke was John's heir—heir apparent, the undoubted hope of the illustrious son of the Parkes. But still, all the same, it jarred upon the old gentleman. He did not like to be put away in his coffin in the family vault in this summary way, not even the chief figure there, but followed soon by John after him, in order that this cock-sparrow should become Lord Frogmore. He knew it was absurd, and he was able to laugh a little at John's dismissal, too, thus accomplished by his little son. But with all the alleviations to be procured in this way, and the evident simplicity of the child, who meant no harm, it was still not pleasant to contemplate. "First, there's you, and when you're dead, papa, and when papa's dead, me." Lord Frogmore laughed to himself and wondered how John would like it, but John was young, and probably would not mind a reference to such a remote possibility, and then it was John's son, not an unknown little boy, who was the speaker. He wondered if that was the sting of it—an unknown little boy—his nephew, indeed, but young enough to be his great-grandchild—a mite of a boy! To realize a long life like Lord Frogmore's, an important life, so much in it, so many people dependent upon it, a life which had lasted so long, an institution in the country, and then to think that it was to be swept away to make room for that imp in knickerbockers! It was ludicrous, it was laughable, but the thing which put a sting in it and made it so disagreeable, so taunting, viewing back and back, thrusting duty in among other thoughts of far more importance, was that it was true. "I'll be Lord Frogmore some day." It was so. Uncle and father must give way to him. They would be put away with their riches, and he would reign. This kept coming back into Lord Frogmore's mind as he walked about the place and inspected the gardens and shrubberies. It flew in upon his thoughts when they were occupied with matters quite different—little Duke's

look and his childish confidence. "I'll be Lord Frogmore some day" came back to him with a persistency which he disliked very much, but could not get rid of. It was quite true—unless in any way Providence should interpose.

There were only two ways in which Providence, even Providence, could interpose. One was a very sad way: that little Duke should die; that he should never come to the heritage which he was quite right in thinking certain. The little fellow might die. This was an alternative that Lord Frogmore, though distinctly irritated by Duke, and resentful of his self-confidence, did not like to contemplate. Die—oh, no! He would not have the little fellow die—a creature so full of hope and promise—oh, no! Let him say what childish follies he pleased, he must not die. But if not, then he must succeed and be Lord Frogmore. Was it absolutely certain that he must be Lord Frogmore?

Frogmore turned this over in his mind as he took his walk—the walk which he never intermitted, and which had done so much to keep him in health. Needless to say that the dearest wish of this old gentleman was to keep in health. The young people may be indifferent to it; they may consent to all sorts of rashness, and run all manner of risks: but when a man is drawing near seventy he knows he must not be guilty of any of these follies. Frogmore thought a good deal about his health, avoided everything that could injure it, denied himself even things that he liked, ate sparingly, rested often, and avoided all subjects that were disagreeable, on principle: that nothing might affect his precious health. But he could not get this childish brag, this little boy's chatter, out of his mind. It was very annoying; it was not worth troubling about; but he could not get it out of his mind. Nevertheless, for some reason or other, he stayed longer at Greenpark than he had any intention of doing. He remained on from day to day, to Mrs. Parke's annoyance yet pleasure.

"It is clear that Frogmore likes being here," she said to her husband with some pride.

"Yes," said John, "but it's a bore."

"It *is* a bore," said Letitia, "but it always looks well to be on such good terms with the head of your family; and most likely he will do something for the children."

"I don't see what he can do for the children; it will all come to us naturally," her husband said.

"Oh, John, *naturally*! How can you talk such nonsense? Naturally he will leave everything he can away from us: but if he takes a liking to the children!" John was obliged, as he usually was, to allow that there was a great deal in what Letitia said.

One afternoon, however, she received disagreeable letters, which had a disastrous influence on Letitia's temper. They were letters about Ralph. She had not very much communication nowadays with her old home. Mr. Ravelstone, of Grocombe, and his sons had no habit of writing. There was not a woman in the family save the wife of the second brother, who had married a housemaid, and naturally she did not attempt to correspond with her sister-in-law. But on this occasion old Mr. Ravelstone wrote, and Willie Ravelstone wrote, and there was a letter from Ralph. "Why did you send him here?" the father and brother asked in tones of despair. "Why didn't you make him go back?" while Ralph himself wrote with jaunty familiarity and sent his love to Frogmore, who he said was a jolly old cock, and to whom he meant to write very soon. Letitia was irritated beyond description by these letters. Her sense of superiority to her own family was great, and to be thus called to account by them was intolerable. And Ralph's boisterous nonsense and his bravado about Lord Frogmore drove her to a kind of frenzy. She turned, as was natural, upon the only person she could assail with the most perfect impunity, upon Mary, at whose head she had almost flung Ralph's letter. The letters came to Greenpark in the afternoon. The gentlemen were all out, or so she thought, and there was no restraint upon the mistress of the house. The drawing-room was a double room, one within the other. And, as ill luck would have it, Lord Frogmore had retired to the inner portion with the newspaper before his sister-in-law came in. She had taken back Ralph's letter from Mary, who followed her into the drawing-room, and now flung it on the table with an exclamation of disgust.

"I do not believe," she said, "that he would ever have come here at all, Mary Hill, but for you. It was you who took him in, and instead of telling him, which was the best possible excuse, that the house was full, though you knew it was, fairly to the door, and I had to get up a story about the covers to make room for Frogmore, whom it's of so much importance to keep well with—instead of getting rid of him in this way with just a simple story

—and true—you gave him your own room—your own room! determined at any risk you'd have him here. What for, in the name of goodness? For you couldn't marry him, though, indeed, one can never tell what a woman will be silly enough to do."

"You know, Letitia," said Mary, deeply wounded, and with some vehemence, "I would not marry your brother—not if he had everything the world could give."

"You say that now, when you know that he is not in that mind; but you were not of the same opinion then. You gave him your own room that you mightn't have to send him away."

"Oh, Letitia," said Mary, "you have always put people in my room when there was any crowding. You have done it twenty times. It seemed so rational, and how was I to know? your own brother——"

"Oh yes," cried Mrs. Parke, "the sort of brother to bring forward among the gentlemen and exhibit to Frogmore! Oh, you knew very well how I should hate it. You did it to be revenged upon me. You wouldn't take the trouble to get him out of the house when I sent you to do it. And now here's father abusing me for sending him home—as if it were any doing of mine. I don't understand you, Mary Hill, after all I've done for you. You know you have not cost your father a sixpence all this year. I gave you the very gown on your back that you might look nice, and brought you into the best society; but you'll not take any trouble or do a single thing for me."

"Oh, Letitia!" said poor Mary, and there was the sound of tears in her voice. Presently she added tremulously, "There's nothing I would not do. If I could only be the housemaid, to have my proper work and know what was expected of me!"

"Oh, yes," cried Letitia sarcastically. "I think I see you at the housemaid's work. You like a great deal better to look nice and play the lady and make up to the gentlemen."

Mary rose hastily to her feet. "If that is your opinion of me," she said hurriedly, "I had much better go away."

"Oh, yes," cried Letitia again, "that is the only other way with people like you—go away! That is the first cry as soon as you are crossed—when you know I have nobody to help me, not a creature I can trust to! But what do *you* care? What does it matter how worried I may be? I can't go away if things go wrong; but you can threaten me—it is nothing to you!"

"What do you want me to do?" cried poor Mary. "You know it is not true that I make up to the gentlemen. I never did at my youngest, and it would be a strange thing if I were to begin now."

"Mary Hill," said Letitia with solemnity, "you know you thought Ralph was your sweetheart when he went away."

"If I ever was such a fool," cried Mary with spirit, "I saw well what a fool I was the first words I exchanged with him. You could not wish so much that he would go away as I did, and you cannot wish so much as I do never to see him again!"

"Well! I hope Ralph Ravelstone is as good as any Hill at all events!" Letitia cried. Her brother might be odious to herself, but, as is usual in such circumstances, she resented disapprobation from others. "If you hadn't thought so you would never have let him in, and Frogmore would never have seen him, and I shouldn't have been ashamed in this way—and now you pretend you never want to see him again! It is just the way with—with people like you. You pull yourselves up by other people's hands, and then you turn upon them. And here you have been currying favour with old Frogmore."

"I—with Lord Frogmore!"

"Yes, you—finding his gloves for him, cutting up the books for him, showing him the way about the grounds, or whatever he wants. And what do you expect you are to make by that? Do you think he will put you in his will? But all he has is ours by right. It ought to go to the children, every penny. And do you think he minds what you do—an old maid? Not a bit. If there is a thing that men despise, it is an old maid."

"Letitia," said Mary, with a trembling voice, "it will do no good for you and me to quarrel. If you ever say anything like this again I will go away from your house that very day. Lord Frogmore is a kind, good man; he is nicer to me than any one in this house. Perhaps the gentlemen here do despise old maids. If they do, I think it shows that they are very silly to despise anybody for such a cause. And it is not very pretty of you to say it. But if ever you speak to me of making up to any one again——"

"Oh, you are just a fool, Mary Hill. Of course I say whatever comes into my head when I am just mad with everybody; and everybody is against me—you too."

And it became audible in the next room that Letitia in her turn



had burst into angry tears. Lord Frogmore had remained quite still in his seat while this conversation was going on. He had not thought it any harm. He listened, and sometimes a smile flitted across his face, sometimes a frown—at one point he started slightly—but no sense of guilt in his eavesdropping was in the mind of this depraved old gentleman. When, however, there occurred this outburst of tears, and it became evident that Mary was occupied in soothing her friend, and that Mrs. Parke was being laid down on the sofa and propped with pillows, that a cup of tea was spoken of as likely to do her good, and every sign was given of a permanent occupation of the other room, Lord Frogmore began to feel much confused as to how he was to escape. There was a glass door which led into the garden, but it was no longer in use, as the weather was growing cold ; and to get through a window even from a room on the ground floor was a perilous attempt for a person of his age. It was, however, the only thing to be done. He opened the window as softly as possible and slipped out, leaving as few traces as he could of his escape. But the sounds, however softened, could not but produce a great effect on the ladies in the outer room. Mrs. Parke sat bolt upright on the sofa, stopped sobbing as if by a miracle, and shivered to the very tips of her toes. Who was it—who could it be ?

“Run round and see,” she whispered hoarsely to Mary, pushing her off as she stood beside the sofa. “For goodness’ sake don’t stand and stare, but run round outside and see.”

*(To be continued.)*

## The Eleanor Crosses.

### A RECORD OF THREE PILGRIMAGES.

READER, what do you know of the town of Northampton? Had that question been put to me a short time back, I could have made no better answer than that its inhabitants made boots and returned Mr. Bradlaugh to Parliament. Nor do I suppose that my ignorance was phenomenal; in these railroad days we rush from point to point without regarding what lies between; and Northampton, which does not happen to be situated in a tourist-haunted neighbourhood, is as much a *terra incognita* to the majority even of well-travelled Englishmen, as if it were in some remote corner of the Continent instead of only some sixty odd miles from Euston Square.

Yet the ancient borough will well repay a visit. It is a flourishing and, for a manufacturing town, a remarkably clean place, for its staple trade is leather—more boots and shoes are made here than in any other town in the United Kingdom, indeed according to the inhabitants more than in all the other towns put together, but that is surely a patriotic fiction, while currying and tanning are briskly carried on within its limits—and the leather trade, though somewhat strong of smell, is a clean one; no tall chimneys pour forth clouds of smoke to hang like a pall over the town, and the little river Nene flows along the valley beneath its walls, unpolluted by the chemical abominations with which other trades poison the unhappy streams of Lancashire and Yorkshire.

Moreover, Northampton is not without interest to the historian and the antiquarian. It was indeed a royal residence (though nothing remains of the castle but a mound near the railway station), and the meeting-place of at least one Parliament, while in the meadows of the Nene hard by the town was fought in the Wars of the Roses a stubborn fight, wherein Warwick the King-maker defeated and took prisoner the ill-starred Henry of Lancaster.

In church architecture Northampton is specially rich, and it boasts among its sacred buildings one of the four round churches which, imitating in their form the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem still attest in this country the Crusading zeal of our forefathers. But it is not in any of these things that the special glory of Northampton consists; sites of royal castles, battle-fields, Norman churches, are scattered up and down the land, and none can tell their number, but scarcely a mile from the centre of Northampton there stands a rarer relic of the past, which with its two surviving sister-monuments, still keeps green the virtues of Eleanor of Castile, wife of Edward Plantagenet, King of England, the first of that name. Indeed, whether we consider them intrinsically as works of art, or for their historical connection with the commanding personalities they commemorate, the Eleanor crosses are certainly unique in this country, and would be hard to match in any land in Christendom.

Eleanor of Castile was the only child of Ferdinand III., "The Saint" (by his wife Joanna Countess of Ponthieu) and sister of Alfonso X., "The Wise," kings of that country. Joanna, it may be noted, inherited the county of Ponthieu, or Poitou, in Picardy from her mother, the Princess Alice of France; and Eleanor, as sole descendant of these princesses, was heiress to Ponthieu which the English crown, ever ready to prefer its claims to French soil, accordingly annexed in her right. She was married, or at any rate betrothed, to Edward, at that time the heir apparent to the English throne, at Burgos in 1254, the bridegroom being fifteen years of age and the bride ten. In 1269 she accompanied her husband on his crusade to the Holy Land, and there shared with him the perils and hardships of the campaign, though it is to be feared that the tale of her having sucked from his arm the poison of the Saracen assassin's dagger must be numbered, along with King Alfred burning the cakes and William Tell shooting the apple from his son's head, among the picturesque fictions of history.

Unfortunately, beyond this apocryphal legend, which can only be traced to one Sanctius, a Spanish chronicler of a much later date, we learn little of Eleanor's personal character, which we are left to surmise from the influence which, both living and dead, she evidently exercised on her royal husband, whose achievements in peace and war fully merit the proud title which history has

bestowed upon him—"the greatest of the Plantagenets." For six-and-thirty years the happiness of their married life continued without check or interruption, and when, in the latter part of 1290, Eleanor died of an autumnal fever at the house of Richard de Weston, at Harby, in Nottinghamshire (or, as some say, at Grantham, in Lincolnshire), Edward, who was on his march to Scotland, in the affairs of which country he was then beginning to interfere, stopped his journey, and allowed all his plans of warlike and political aggrandisement to rest in abeyance till he had honoured with obsequies of fit solemnity and pomp the loving partner of so many years' happiness and glory.

Slowly the funeral procession wound its way southwards from the place of the Queen's death to the Abbey at Westminster, and at every stage of the journey was erected within the four succeeding years, on the spot where the hearse rested for the night, "a cross of wonderful size," whereby not only might the memory of Eleanor be preserved, but also the passer-by might be induced to stop and offer up prayers for the eternal welfare of her soul.

Accordingly at Lincoln, Grantham, Stamford, Geddington, Northampton, Stony Stratford, Woburn, Dunstable, St. Albans, Waltham, West Cheap, and Charing (and perhaps at one or two other points, for the total number has been variously stated) arose these graceful records of royal love and sorrow, all of which, save those at Geddington, Northampton, and Waltham, time or the ruder hand of the religious reformer has turned to dust. Of those that remain none is in an inaccessible situation. Northampton is but sixty-six miles from London, Geddington some twelve miles further, while Waltham is but thirteen from Liverpool Street Station; yet how few of us have seen even one of them! The modern copy at Charing Cross, which dates only from the building of the railway station in front of which it stands, has made Londoners familiar with the general aspect of these memorials, but why be content with the reproduction while the originals are within such easy reach? Let me at any rate retrace for the reader's benefit my pilgrimages to these three interesting relics of the past, and endeavour to induce him to bend his steps, should opportunity offer, in the same direction.

My first point was naturally the cross known as that of Northampton, which stands barely a mile to the south of the

town, in the parish of Hardingstone, on the road to London. Leaving the centre of the town, my way lay down a street of little interest, across the river Nene and the railway. By this time the town is left behind, and a purely country road stretches ahead up a gentle hill. Smiling fields, rich with the autumnal harvest, are on the right, and on the left the beautiful park of Delapré, the waving woods of which add a sylvan charm to the landscape. As I ascend the slope, I begin to wonder where the cross can be. I have surely traversed the mile that I was told would bring me to it, and yet from the footpath on which I walk, and from which, raised as it is at this point some feet above the roadway, I can see a considerable distance ahead, I detect no signs of it. Have I mistaken the route? No, my directions were too plain and simple for that to be possible; there is no soul in sight of whom to ask, so I resume my walk, and at the distance of some six paces from the spot where I have stood in doubt I find myself face to face with the object of my search.

It stands on a level platform of turf, part, it is said, of an old Roman encampment, a little above the raised footpath on which I have been walking. A semicircle of silver-beech trees, part of the glories of Delapré Park, forms a graceful background, and it is by the leafy branches of one of these trees, which overhangs the roadway, that the cross is hidden from the gaze of the wayfarer until he is close upon it. I can call to mind nothing more striking to the senses than the sudden way in which the cross thus bursts upon the view; it partakes in some degree of the surprises of the theatre, but is entirely void of any suspicion of stage trickery. There, not, as I had pictured to myself, in the busy streets of Northampton, but on a peaceful country wayside with not a house in sight; in perfect solitude save for a lazy waggoner and his team far up the road, rises the memorial of the Princess of Castile who was for thirty-six years the wife of the Great Plantagenet. Slowly, amid a silence broken only by the song of the birds and the rustle of the wind among the leaves, I walk round the cross, and endeavour to master its details. With its general plan the modern reproduction in the Strand has already familiarized me; it consists of three stories, successively diminishing in size as they ascend, and was originally surmounted by a cross, of which, however, the broken shaft now alone remains; the whole being mounted on a flight of stone steps;

nine in number, which give additional height and dignity to the structure. The first or lower story is octagonal in form, and rises some fourteen feet from the platform on which it stands. Each of its eight fronts is divided longitudinally into two panels or compartments, and adorned with escutcheons, whereon are sculptured the arms of England, Castile, Leon, and of the county of Ponthieu. Beneath the escutcheons every alternate face is further adorned with the representation of an open book, sculptured in high relief, and displayed on a lectern or reading desk.

On this lower story, the second or middle one rises to the height of some twelve feet ; it also is octagonal, and consists of eight open tabernacles, supported by slender pillars and canopied with ornamental pediments and pinnacles of very graceful workmanship. In every alternate tabernacle there stands a crowned effigy of the Queen, about six feet high.

From the third story, which has four sides, facing (as do the statues of the Queen and the four lower panels adorned with the open books) the four cardinal points of the compass, springs the now broken shaft of the cross itself, which rises to a total height of some forty feet from the highest step of the base.

Such is the general outline of the Eleanor Cross of Northampton. The whole structure is of remarkable beauty, being of that exquisite period in our architecture when the Early English style was in transition to the Decorated. It must be confessed, however, that it does not stand before us now untouched since the days of its architect, John de la Bataille, for the hand of the restorer has dealt somewhat heavily with it. The statues of the Queen, standing as they do under the protection of their tabernacles, have fortunately escaped any attempts at renovation, but the suspicious sharpness and regularity of the ornamental details throughout, and especially of the cornice to the lower story and of the pinnacles which surmount the second, tell their own tale of modern interference. If it be true that the repairs, as we now see them, were executed in 1713, a period when Gothic architecture was little understood or appreciated, we may indeed be thankful that they were carried out in so reverent a spirit ; one has only to remember how more than one of our cathedrals fared beneath the hands of "restoring" architects of the last



century to guess the fate which might at that date readily have befallen the Northampton cross.

As I reluctantly turn my back on this beautiful and interesting relic, and retrace my steps to Northampton, I determine that my newly awakened enthusiasm for the good Queen Eleanor will not be satisfied until I have undertaken a pilgrimage to each of the sister monuments at Geddington and Waltham.

Fortunately, from Northampton my next stage is easy enough. The village of Geddington, the last halting-place of the funeral procession before the county town, is easily reached by rail, and the next morning, in magnificent autumn weather, the strong sun tempered by a pleasant breeze, I step out of the train upon the platform of the little rustic station of Geddington, and look eagerly about me for the village and the cross. But I look in vain! The station is planted in the midst of fields, and not a house is in sight. Driven to seek counsel of the station-master, I fancy I detect a smile lurking on that worthy's face, as he informs me that the village and cross are quite two miles off by the nearest way across the fields, that the station is not in Geddington parish at all, and is much nearer to other villages—what they were I now forget—than to that whose name it bears. Internally I bless with some cordiality the humour of the railway company which so facetiously misleads its passengers; but, after all, there is no harm done; it is a lovely day; a two-mile walk will be nothing, if only I manage to find that "nearest way across the fields," otherwise I stand a chance of converting the two miles into  $x$ , the unknown quantity. However, the station-master's directions are simple and explicit; and I am soon making my way over the broad grass fields which render Northamptonshire second to none as a hunting county. There is little danger of losing myself; there is but one path, and that a clearly defined one, so I have no choice but to follow it; and it brings me through pleasant fields, and under leafy avenues (in which this part of Northamptonshire is particularly rich), until I strike the high-road, and see beneath me, in a gentle valley, the graceful church of the village I am in quest of. Shall I take to the road, or stick to my footpath through the fields, which from this point appears the less direct route of the two? I decide in favour of the footpath, nor do I find reason to regret my choice, as I pass a quaint little Early English church, securely locked, alas! and an enormous dove-cot, all that remains—save certain

mounds in the neighbouring field, which indicate an extensive ground plan—of a great mansion of the Treshams, the family of that faint-hearted conspirator whose scruples fortunately wrecked the Gunpowder Plot. Past a mill-stream and quaint old mill my path conducts me, until I regain the high-road, a few hundred yards only from the houses of Geddington. The short village street is soon traversed, and in a wide open space, where three roads meet, there stands before me the object of my second pilgrimage.

Strange as it may appear, though Geddington is but a small agricultural parish of some 800 inhabitants, its cross entirely lacks that verdant setting of foliage and turf which adds so unspeakable a charm to that of Northampton. Surely Oxford Street itself, that "stony-hearted stepmother," was never stonier than are the narrow thoroughfares of this country village. Its cottages, built of the yellow ironstone of the neighbourhood, stand close up to the roadway; their little gardens lie behind them, and are hidden from the eye of the passer-by; scarcely a creeper relieves the bareness of the stone walls; the space where stands the cross, and in which you would expect to find a village-green, is destitute of even a blade of grass; but the cross stands well on this wide, open site, with a sad dignity not unbecoming its votive purpose.

In its general scheme it resembles the structure at Northampton, in that it is mounted on a broad flight of steps, and consists of three diminishing stories, in the second of which are enshrined statues of the Queen; but here all likeness ends between the two memorials.

The lower story of the Geddington cross, which rises from a flight of seven steps to a height of some fifteen feet, is profusely ornamented on each of its three sides with a beautiful diapered pattern of roses, and with escutcheons bearing, as at Northampton, the arms of England, Castile, Leon, and Ponthieu. Above, in the second story, are six tabernacles, in each pair of which stands a statue of the Queen, intersected to the eye of the spectator by their dividing column. The tabernacles are some twelve feet high, and above them again rises the third story, which, unlike that of Northampton, is of equal height and importance with the others, and helps to give to this structure the effect of a graceful spire, in whose harmonious outline the three successive compartments are less readily detected than in the more massive proportions of its sister memorial. But the great glory of the Geddington cross,

the point in which it distances both its rivals, is the fact that it has never been touched by the hand of the restorer. Of the cross itself which formerly rose upon its summit, time or the iconoclastic hand of some bigoted reformer has bereft it; but in all other respects it stands now in the heart of this little village just as the artist-masons of the Great Plantagenet left it six centuries ago. The detail of the diapered panels, of the armorial bearings on the escutcheons, of the pinnacles and fretwork that adorn the tabernacles, is surprisingly fresh and sharp. It seems to owe its superior durability partly to its material, which is darker and of rougher grain than the Caen stone of the Northampton cross, and partly to its position, which is in a valley surrounded by the buildings of the village, whereas the other stands on the brow of a hill, overlooking the valley of the Nene, in a position which must, before the growth of the woods in which it is now embosomed, have been considerably exposed to the elements. The little "place" (as it would be called in a French town) of Geddington, in the centre of which the cross stands, though sadly lacking in that repose to the eye which foliage and turf afford, is not without a picturesqueness of its own. At the foot of the cross is an ancient well, and I hear that hard by it, a very few years ago, were to be found the village stocks, which neighbouring yokels not yet middle-aged can remember to have seen not untenanted. Pity to have swept them away! pity to remove anything that adds to the old-world aspect of this sleeping village! For, look where I will up and down the three streets which meet at the cross, all is drowsy and still. I cross the churchyard and enter the church, a fine building exhibiting examples of various styles of architecture, from Norman to Perpendicular; it has been judiciously restored, and is well kept. Behind it, to the north-east, is the site of the royal residence and "chase" (the existence of which no doubt caused so small a place as Geddington to be chosen as one of the stopping-places of the funeral train), now denoted only by a few mounds in a grass field. Such inquiries as I can make establish the fact that tourists and sight-seers rarely make their way here; the little inn appears to cater only for the wants of the natives and their near neighbours, and I gather that the few strangers who find their way through the village of Geddington do so to attend the meets of the Pytchley hounds, and not to gaze on the memorial cross of Eleanor of Castile.

Some months elapsed before I was able to complete my task, as business kept me away from the neighbourhood of London, and it was mid-winter before I could set forth on my third pilgrimage, which had for its object the cross at Waltham.

Short are the glories of January sunshine; and long ere the Great Eastern Railway had transported me past the dingy Eastern suburbs into the flat open country thereunto adjacent, and had set me down at the station of Waltham Cross, the bright morning which had tempted me to select the day for my expedition had turned dull and overcast, and was not without a distinct threatening of rain.

On quitting the station, the road, which here crosses the railway, leads on the right hand to the town of Waltham (with its famous abbey church, the burial-place of Harold, our last Saxon king) and on the left to the memorial of the Plantagenet queen. Turning first, then, to the left, a walk of a few hundred yards brings me to the cross, which stands at the angle formed by the junction of the road from Waltham, along which I have come, with the great road from London to the north. The first impression I received from the Waltham cross, as compared with its surviving sisters at Northampton and Geddington, was certainly disappointing; for its surroundings, even if every allowance be made for the different conditions of climate and atmosphere under which I saw the three crosses, are squalid and depressing, while the state of the structure itself attests only too plainly how much it has suffered at one time from neglect, at another from meddling restoration. In general scheme the Waltham cross closely resembles that of Northampton. Its proportions, as far as one can judge of what is now chiefly the handiwork of successive restorers, while less massive than the Northampton cross, can have yielded to it not a jot in grace and elegance. The lower story, in which alone at the present time any antique masonry is to be seen, is hexagonal, and each of its six faces is divided, as are the eight sides of the Northampton memorial, into two panels or compartments, wherein are repeated the armorial bearings of England, Leon, Castile, and Ponthieu. The whole effect of this lower story, notwithstanding its unhappily dilapidated state, is extremely rich, the beauty of the mouldings and of a diapered pattern above being specially noticeable.

Unfortunately above this story the hand of the restorer is evi-

dent in every stone of the structure. The three statues of the Queen, which stand much as do the four effigies at Northampton, in the richly decorated tabernacles of the second story, exhibit the old workmanship, but even these have not wholly escaped renovation, for the figure which faces westward was some half-century ago provided with new hands and head by Sir Richard Westmacott.

In the tabernacles wherein the statues are placed, and indeed in the whole of the structure from the cornice of the lower story upwards, all is new, little more than suggesting, even at its best, what must have been the original effect. The greater part of this new work is undoubtedly based on such fragments of the older detail as have survived ; but the tapering shaft and the finial cross by which it is surmounted were added by Mr. W. B. Clarke, who restored the monument in 1833, and appear to have no better authority than the imagination of that architect, as they are not to be found in the earlier engravings of the memorial. Indeed, so frequently have the hands of the restorer been laid upon the Waltham cross during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that it is hard to conjecture how much or how little of it has escaped their renovating touch. One learns that it was "preserved from decay" by the Society of Antiquaries in 1721 and in 1757, in spite of which it was in 1796 again in a very neglected state, and was only saved from wholesale removal to Theobald's Park early in the present century by the decayed condition of its materials. From that date its plight grew worse and worse, until the restoration of 1833 was undertaken, when it is described as having become little better than a shapeless mass of stones, of which a few years more of neglect would have left nothing remaining.

The restoration of 1833 was extensive ; it was not, however, conducted with sufficient regard for the old work, nor has it proved of enduring workmanship, for the general decay of the stone then added has rendered necessary a further restoration which is only just completed.

The Waltham cross, moreover, suffers (as we have hinted) from its surroundings, inasmuch as it lacks the broad flight of steps and the wide open site of its sisters. Originally no doubt it stood much as they do ; but in the middle of the last century its steps were removed, and a base of brick-work was substituted which in turn has given way to the present flight of four modern,

steps on which the cross now stands. The whole structure suffers much from the meanness of its base, and is further dwarfed by an iron railing of the poorest modern design and in most indifferent repair, which encircles the lowest step; while its disfigurement is completed by the incongruous addition of some half-dozen cannons, planted upright in the ground, muzzle upwards, at intervals round the railing. It is to be feared that in so suburban a locality as Waltham the railing is a necessity, for the lower part of the cross bears marks, some of them quite recent, of cockney vandalism; but it is to be hoped that a guard more efficient and more in harmony with the whole structure may soon be provided.

Another, and perhaps the most serious drawback to the appearance of this Eleanor cross, consists in the encroachment of the adjacent houses, to which indeed the removal of the steps is said to be due. When the monument was erected it is probable that the only building in the neighbourhood was the "Oulde Four Swannes Hostellerie," supposed to have then been the manor house of Cheshunt, in which parish, by the way, the cross is situated. Gradually however there has grown up round it a small hamlet, the houses of which have approached closer and closer to the memorial, until one of them, the Falcon inn, actually abutted on it, the angle of the roof leaning against one of the statues of the Queen. At the restoration of 1833 this nuisance was partially abated, and the wall of the inn was set back a few feet, as far indeed as the railing at the base of the modern steps. The entire removal of the inn and the addition of two or three steps at the base of the structure would restore to it the beauty of proportion of which modern vandalism has bereft it, and it is satisfactory to learn that the bounty of well-wishers is likely to provide for these improvements.

The waning light of the winter day warned me that if I wished to see the abbey church at Waltham before I returned to town it was time to be moving; so I set my face eastwards in the direction of the old market town and the abbey, which for many a year before the time of Eleanor of Castile bore the name of Waltham Holy Cross, and as I walk, and later on as the train carries me in leisurely fashion over the thirteen miles which intervene between Waltham and Liverpool Street, my mind runs on the Eleanor crosses, on the great Plantagenet statesman and warrior



their founder, and on the gentle Spanish princess whom they commemorate. I try to picture to myself the funeral train of the Queen as it wended its toilsome way over the rough country roads of mediæval England, through whose difficulties the labouring team must have had much ado to drag the heavy hearse ; I seem to see the wintry sun glinting on the steel-clad troops, and on the tall figure of the King as he rides behind, sitting squarely on his great war-horse, the knots of country folk gathering awe-struck on the road-side to gaze on the passing cortège, the gorgeous processions of ecclesiastics, with their attendant acolytes, who poured from the countless religious houses to do due honour to the mighty dead and to her sorrowing consort, whereof an old chronicler of Dunstable tells us that " Her body passed through our town, and rested one night, and two precious cloths, to wit baudekyns, were given unto us. Of wax we had eighty pounds or more, and when the body of the said Queen was departing from Dunstable, the bier rested in the centre of the market-place until the King's Chancellor and the great men then there present had marked out a fitting place where they might afterwards erect, at the royal expense, a cross of wonderful size, our prior being then present and sprinkling holy water."

The cross of Dunstable was destroyed by the soldiers of the Earl of Essex in 1643, and during the civil war between Charles I. and the Parliament five other of the Eleanor crosses are known to have been demolished, viz., those of Stamford, Stony Stratford, Woburn, West Cheap, and Charing ; the last to go was that of St. Albans, which was taken down as lately as 1701, without even the questionable excuse of mistaken religious zeal, but for no better reason than that the sapient inhabitants did not consider that "such kind of antiquities invited many curious travellers to come thither." Indeed, when we consider the havoc which religious and political passions have wrought on the most beautiful structures reared by the piety of our ancestors, we must feel constrained to wonder, not that so many of the Eleanor crosses have been levelled with the ground, so that not even is their site nor their number exactly known, but that three of them should still fortunately be counted among our remaining historical relics, to testify to the love of an English king and the skill of English artists six hundred years ago. For let it not be forgotten that the architects and sculptors of the Eleanor crosses were mostly of native birth. Among them were

John de Bello or de la Bataille (that is of Battle in Sussex), architect of the crosses at Northampton, Stony Stratford, Dunstable, Woburn, and St. Albans ; Richard de Stowe, architect of the Lincoln cross ; Richard and Roger Crundale, two brothers, who built the cross of Charing ; Michael of Canterbury, architect of the Cheapside cross ; Robert de Corf (of Corfe in Dorsetshire), who was employed on the cross at Waltham ; and Ralph de Chichester, who worked on the crosses at Stony Stratford and Woburn. The sculptors employed on the effigies of the Queen were Alexander of Abingdon, William of Ireland, Dymenge (or Dominic) of Rheims, a Frenchman, and William Torel or Torelli, "goldsmith of London," who was probably of Italian birth. Walpole, it is true, assigns the designs for the Eleanor crosses to the Roman sculptor Pietro Cavallini ; but inasmuch as that artist was, according to the best accounts, only eleven years old when Eleanor died, and as, moreover, his name does not appear in the accounts of the Queen's executors or of Edward's household expenses, wherein are set down the disbursements for the memorials, it is hard to credit on this point the author of the "*Anecdotes of Painting*," whose archæological correctness is by no means above suspicion.

Without undervaluing the debt which we owe to our Puritan ancestors for the stubborn courage with which they wrested our political liberties from the unwilling grasp of the Stuart we may unreservedly lament the ravages of these iron-sided champions of freedom on the art treasures of England. The storm which dispersed our royal picture galleries and devastated our cathedrals did not, it may be readily understood, spare the Eleanor crosses, which savoured of the two hateful institutions of Popery and monarchy. The stern logic of the Cromwellian recognized no distinction between kings and kings, and ruthlessly swept away the crosses raised by Edward Plantagenet, one of the founders of the English constitution and of the system of Parliamentary government, to show with what determination he resisted the encroachments of Charles Stuart on that very constitution.

When we reflect how many priceless gems of art perished irreparably in those troublous times, we cannot but be thankful for the treasures which yet remain to us, among which long may we still happily count the three memorial crosses of Queen Eleanor of Castile.

STEWART DAWSON.

## Only a Comedy?

By EDITH STEWART DREWRY,

Author of "ON DANGEROUS GROUND," "A DEATH RING," "ONLY AN ACTRESS," &c., &c.

### CHAPTER I.

#### FATHER AND SON.

"No, sir; I tell you once and for all, NO!" exclaimed Sir Bertram de L'Orme, striking his hand heavily down on the padded arm of the huge old library chair in which he sat, in about as big a passion as he could possibly put himself into and keep himself up to—a harder job, that last, than the obstinate fiery old gentleman would have admitted for worlds. "Good heavens, boy! you must think I'm gone as stark mad as you are to dare to even ask me such a monstrous thing!"

"My dear father!" came the softest, most melodious of voices that ever wiled a woman's heart.

"Dear fiddlesticks, sir!" down on the carpet went the baronet's foot with a stamp that told his sixty years had no lack of vigour; "much you young scamps ever care if you bitterly disappoint your parents by making fools of yourselves about any pretty face you see, if you can only get your way; but I'll be hanged if *you* shall. My only son, forsooth, marry an actress—a mere high-comedy actress—not you, young man!"

"I'll be hanged if I don't, though, and under your very nose, too," muttered the son under his moustache, with the most wicked flash in his handsome eyes, as they glanced covertly at his father, but aloud with ominous meekness:

"Gabrielle Fane is none the less a lady born and bred because she is an actress."

"Don't tell me"—another stamp—"the world's topsy-turvy nowadays! We're jostled cheek-by-jowl by persons whom we'd hardly have to hold our horse stirrups whilst we mount. Gentle-folks turn play-actors, and play-actors figure it about in society, all the more if it's a woman who has walked through that sink of a divorce court, or been the heroine of a disgraceful scandal: the

minute she's made everything else too hot for her, she turns upon the stage ; nice lot they are ! ”

“ And discredits it without ever being an actress—yes, I fully endorse that ! ” said the young man ; “ but I know you don't mean to cast a slur on Miss Fane, either as a woman or an actress, so perhaps you will relent. Ah ! father, is it nothing that I love her ? ”

“ No, all nonsense—fancy ! ” The baronet got up and began walking up and down angrily. “ You—you won't come over me that way, sir—just caught by a pretty, artful girl, that's all. (Confound the fellow ! he's got his mother's eyes and voice, her very look and tone). Audley, if you dare to make the girl an offer in the face of my flat refusal to such a disgraceful marriage, I'll disinherit you and never speak to you again.”

The son, half sitting on the edge of the table, pulled his moustache as his eyes covertly followed the fine old man, and the younger's face and look were a study for the world of meaning in them and the mobile change with every emotion : the most rich, wicked mischief and amusement as at the finest comedy, dashed with a *souffçon* of irony about the resolute mouth ; then a smile of exquisite beauty stole over the handsome face, softening the firm, delicate lips with even womanly tenderness, giving the softness of velvet to the heavily fringed, deep hazel eyes.

“ You dear old man,” he murmured, “ the first is possible, but not the second, for either of us. I wonder which of us loves the other most ! Equally, I think, only its character is different : and he has had all the burden of anxiety and responsibility. God bless his dear grey head ! ”

The tie between this father and son was a peculiarly close and touching one.

Sir Bertram at six-and-twenty, Audley's present age, had married a beautiful woman, whom he deeply loved. Two daughters were born (both long since married), but it was not till after a lapse of five years that a son and heir was born—his parents' idol. The mother had died some eleven years ago, which irreparable loss had only strengthened the loving ties left.

Sir Bertram was simply wrapped up in his boy, his noble, high-spirited boy, with his beloved wife's voice and eyes, and fine temper, full of mischief and fun as she had been, and so handsome and clever that his father might well be proud of him.

Both were at present guests, with others, of a rich retired Scottish advocate and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Graham, whose son Jack and Audley were Eton and Oxford chums, and also shared, Audley especially, great dramatic tastes and liking. There young De L'Orme had met Miss Fane, who was down both as a guest and professionally, staying this Christmastide at Green Towers to play "lead" in the theatricals which were to take place.

Audley, who was a very clever amateur actor, had undertaken to be leading gentleman, Jack was second, and his cousin, Helen Forrest, the "utility lady." They had all four been a fortnight in the house to arrange, to rehearse, and so forth, before the other guests arrived, Sir Bertram having only come down yesterday, and it still wanted a week to Christmas Day.

To and fro went the angry old man, sputtering and exploding all the more irascibly because his son's silence gave him no fresh excuse for attack.

"Yes, I mean it, though no doubt you flatter yourself I don't. It is just a mad, folly-struck infatuation, and I'll never consent, if you wait ten years for it. You're an ungrateful young scamp, sir! I've spoiled and indulged you till you think there's to be no limit to it, but I *am* your father, for all that, and I'll be obeyed in this! *My* son to disgrace himself and name, indeed!"

Audley bit his lip hard, for it was quivering, and his eyes sparkled again with mischief, but he managed to say with much humility and tolerable steadiness of voice:

"I don't quite see much disgrace in honestly marrying a young lady, father; but I'll say no more."

And he left the room.

## CHAPTER II.

### TWO PICKLES.

"I MUST think it over before to-night," he muttered, his bright eyes now brimful of fun, "then talk to Jack if I've first seen—Whew! what an awful lark it will be! and he'll thank me in the end, I know. Wonder where they're all gone" (which meant, of course, "Where is *she* gone?"). "I'll stroll into the park and cogitate over my idea."

He made his way to the entrance hall of the mansion, took up his felt hat, popped on his furred ulster, lighted the inevitable

cigarette, and went out. It was a fine winter's day, the trees and park, and hills beyond, white with the snow which had fallen lightly in the dawn, and the young man walked on, enjoying the beauty around as he took his way towards a part of the park where, down in a dell, a romantic little rustic bridge crossed a miniature river. As he reached the spot where the road descended sharply, he caught sight of a tall, slender figure standing below on the brink of the stream, and in a moment he had bounded forward and impulsively caught the girl's hands.

"Miss Fane!—Gabrielle!—forgive me: but to see your face—you here!—oh, you must have seen I love you—that I meant more than mere flirtation!"

"What else?—I had no right," the young actress faltered—"I only thought——"

But De L'Orme dropped those hands, to fold his arms about the slender form that half shrank, half yielded, to him, and bowed his head to hers.

"Sweetheart!—wife!" he whispered, "you *do* love me—you do love me—and so——"

"Oh! Audley!"—for with the word her lover boldly lifted the fair young face from his heart and kissed the crimson lips again and again. "Don't—don't!—oh! let me go, Audley—your father will never consent, and I cannot come between you two"—this with a bitter, half-stifled sob, and her futile effort against his strength ceased.

"Listen to me, dearest,—nay, first let me kiss the tears from those pretty eyes, and see them smile again, for it will all come right if you will only trust to me, and act out literally a serio-comedy with me."

Gabrielle looked up quickly as he now released her.

"What do you mean, Audley? You look—oh! so wicked!" At which Audley rippled out into such irresistibly gleeful laughter, that she was fain to laugh too, out of sheer infection.

"The preliminary matter is happily settled—now," said he, putting her hand in his arm, "so we'll stroll back, or you'll get chilled. Well, I suppose you will allow that I know my dear old *pater* better than you?"

"Why, yes."

"Of course he will never consent," continued Audley, his eyes dancing. "He has all the old-fashioned prejudice against the



stage, and I am perfectly aware that he never will give his consent beforehand to his son's marriage with an actress; he has just to-day told me so; indeed, I was forbidden to make you an offer at all, under pain of disinheritance and never speaking to me again."

"Audley—Audley,—and you have done it!"

"My dear, don't be alarmed. Firstly, I shan't tell him; secondly, the last threat is simply empty air; he couldn't keep to it for six months, nor I either. I asked his consent to-day, as a matter of form, to fall back upon, do you see; he went into a passion, as I expected, and won't believe my heart is involved beyond 'a mad folly-struck infatuation,' and nothing will convince him it is but the inexorable logic of fact. The evil deed once done (as he has no real standpoint but prejudice), he is just one of those people who accept the inevitable. We might wait, wait, for ever, in vain, but once the fatal ring on this pretty hand, and I've not much fear but that he will come round. That is my dear father, the best, the dearest, that ever son had."

"Dear Audley! I love to see you two together!"

"Ah! my bonnie one, and how I shall presently love to see you two together," said Audley tenderly. "Well, I cannot openly defy him, and, equally, I cannot give you up, nor would I ask you to either elope or wed me secretly. And yet it shall be done openly before his face and scores of witnesses, and neither the *pater* nor any one will say a word to forbid—won't know it till it's too late."

"What do you mean, Audley?" said she, utterly mystified, but as much on the *qui vive* for mischief—young puss—as he was—harum-scarum pair of scapegraces that they were.

For answer, he stopped, and whispered something rather lengthy in her ear, ending with—"That's the lark. Are you game?"

She hesitated, but he persisted eagerly, and repeated the question.

"Yes, then. Oh! Audley, what fun, if you're quite sure of your ground, and of those three!"

"Sure as a church, darling. I'll speak to Jack and my man, and you take Helen in hand to-night. The game is worth the candle, if only for the comedy of it!"

And then off they went into peals of laughter, as if they were a couple of schoolboys, but then between them they only made up forty-seven years.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE PLOT THICKENS.

"JACK, old fellow, are you awake?"

"Eh! Just going off," came a sleepy voice. "What's up?—Is that you, Audley?"

"Rather—hush!"

Audley noiselessly stole into his friend's room, shut the door, set down his lamp, and seated himself on the side of Jack's bed.

"Now then, wake up, mate; I want to talk to you."

Jack Graham shook himself, rubbed his eyes, and pulled himself up a bit on the pillows.

"You're wide awake enough, by Jove!" said he; "fire away, my son! What's in the wind?"

"A lark."

"That of course, wherever you're around. I'm your man, if you want one."

Young scamp the second had pricked up directly, like a blood-hound picking up his scent.

"You're a stunner, Jack, and so is your fair Helen. Well, firstly, I've been and gone and done it."

"No—you don't say so—how jolly!" cried Jack, in a delighted whisper. "Give us your hand on that, brother *fiancé*."

Their two hands met; then Jack said, "Of course your governor is mad as a hatter—won't hear of an actress at any price."

"Oh! he was down on me this morning because I told him I loved Gabrielle, and asked his consent if I won her," said Audley. "Dear old man, his bark is much worse than his bite, if one doesn't go too far, and knows how to keep the weather side of him, as I do. He'll stand out for ever and a day as long as there is a loophole for hope to shine through, and if once the inevitable is done and past praying for, he'll give in."

"By Jove! Audley, it's a bold stroke, and like your cheek. Go ahead! Is it an elopement, then?"

"No, no, Jack. Look here. You've picked up a lot of law from your father, and are reading for the Bar."

"Yes?"

"And we've both, Gabrielle and I, been a fortnight in this Scotch parish of Greenbanks, and by Christmas Day shall have been twenty-one days resident in it."

"Yes?" said Jack again, with round eyes of delight—"I begin to twig the lark—by Jingo! A Scotch marriage, eh?"

De L'Orme nodded significantly, laughing silently.

"That's it, my son—just to be too legally tied for any law-courts to break it. I suppose our all being good staunch Church people won't affect that?"

"Not a bit, my boy. You must both mean it to be reality, and be able to prove the fullest intention to take each other, and no irate father or law could get rid of the legal bond. Sir Bertram would be done, and have nothing for it but to consent to a real, decent, Christian marriage in church."

"Exactly, Jack—the only one any of us could recognize, of course, and that is my game," returned his friend. "Now listen to my plan."

He leant forward, and in a very low voice, interrupted once or twice by stifled merriment, detailed his idea, and when he concluded, Jack just lay back, smothered his face in the bed-clothes, and laughed till the bed shook again, Audley keeping him company to the full.

"By Jove!—what a lark! It'll be the death of me, Audley," spluttered Jack at last, coming to the surface as red as a turkeycock—"just picture them all, and your governor's face! I shall burst, I know. Of course Nell will help, and Gabrielle is too jolly for anything. A comedy indeed!—ha—ha—ha!—Will it be only a comedy, though? Not if we know it, eh?"

"We are a graceless quartet of rackets, I guess," laughed young De L'Orme, getting up and taking the lamp. "Good-night, Jack, and pleasant dreams to you!"

The next day brought down the rest of the guests, making the house party about fifteen, exclusive, of course, of the Grahams and their ward, Miss Forrest, Jack's *fiancée*, but some forty more of the surrounding gentry had been invited to dinner on Christmas Day, the entertainment of the evening being Fairleigh's charming three-act comedy "Just too Late"—not a farce, but real comedy on the old lines, full of true wit and fine irony, with touches both of pathos and passion to set off the high comedy. Written in the historical period of the "fifties," the dresses and staging had been brought up to date by Gabrielle Fane and De L'Orme.

The play hadn't been done for years, and probably there were

none of the expected audience who knew it much, save by name—certainly not its details of scene or dialogue—so that the slight additions interpolated in the last act by our racketty quartet who played the four leading parts would pass undetected. Dancing was to wind up the evening, of course. Perfectly aware that Sir Bertram was on the *qui vive* as to his son's attitude towards the beautiful actress during that whole week, Audley took very good care to pay her even less attention than before; he even chose to rather devote himself to a pretty heiress, Arabella Munroe, till the dear old gentleman began to flatter himself that his worshipped harum-scarum boy was quite nonplussed by his own stern prohibition, and had given up all thoughts of "that actress," whom he watched to see if she did "set her cap" at his son, and the more he did so the more vexed he grew, because, in his secret heart of hearts, he felt drawn by her beauty and soft voice, and unaffected charm of manner: how he could have loved such a daughter if she had never trod the stage and—horror!—played boys' parts, and been made love to off and on the stage by everybody.

Dear, prejudiced, big-hearted old man! if he could only have seen into the library one night late after every one had retired, what would he have said? For there sat Mr. Jack with a very legal written declaration, Audley, Gabrielle, and Helen by him as he laid it on the table, and then the two first signed it, and the other two signed below, as witnesses to whatever it was, then they all looked at each other, and then—if that audacious young Audley didn't stoop a little and coolly kiss the actress!

## CHAPTER IV.

### IN FRONT.

"DEAR Mrs. Graham," asked a lady in the drawing-room before dinner on Christmas Day, "who *is* that beautiful aristocratic-looking girl, dressed like a picture, to whom Mr. de L'Orme has just spoken?"

The hostess smiled.

"A great favourite of ours, Lady Ogilvie; that is Gabrielle Fane, the actress."

"Really! What an exquisite face! Dangerous!" laughed Lady

Ogilvie good-naturedly. "I wonder how Sir Bertram likes his son playing the lover's part to such a pretty creature!"

"Oh! this isn't the first time, you know, and it becomes such a matter of business," said Mrs. Graham, "and Audley has been rather attentive to Bella Munroe lately. I think he laughs and flirts so with all the pretty women, bad boy, single, engaged, or married, that you can never tell whether he means anything or not."

So said the hostess, but she was as shrewd as she was charming, and had an inkling that De L'Orme did care for the young actress, and only scattered dust about to blind some folks.

Dinner was now announced, at the primitive hour of half-past six, and a hearty banquet it was, for Mr. Graham beamed from the head, the jolliest, most hospitable of hosts, and Mrs. Graham beamed from the bottom, a mile off, and if anything had flagged at all, Audley and Jack and Gabrielle were a host in themselves to keep things going. Dear me! how tongues did wag, and laughter ripple round, and how delicious it is to hear a good, hearty, joyous laugh run round a roomful of people. But all things have an end, and between half-past eight and nine the numerous guests, minus the players, were assembled and seated in the first of the spacious suite of reception rooms, the second of which, divided by a heavy green curtain, was the stage.

Whilst the audience waited, and the little band played, the buzz of talk went round, and programmes were studied and questions asked.

Arabella Munroe, seated between Lady Ogilvie and one of her admirers, read over her programme.

"I don't know the comedy at all, Mr. Selkirk," said she; "do you? What is it all about—the story, and all that, you know?"

"'Pon my word, Miss Munroe, it is several years ago that I saw it, and I can't tell you more than the outline."

"Oh! do tell me, then, if you don't mind."

"If!" said Selkirk. "It is only a pleasure to please you. Well, if I remember rightly, this Lady Geraldine Beaufoy has two suitors, one of whom, Captain Fancourt (that's De L'Orme's part), she favours."

"She is a harum-scarum girl, isn't she?"

"Yes, and awfully jolly," returned Selkirk. "The other suitor, Sir Jasper Goldhawk, is a rich cad, who has got her father—I

forget how—in his power, so that she and her lover are obliged to play him rather like a salmon, you know, aided by her Lucille (Miss Forrest) and Fancourt's faithful man, William Hunt (played by De L'Orme's real own man), and Lucille's brother Tom (Jack Graham), the registrar of births, deaths, and marriages."

"Oh! I see—hence in the last act the scene put down 'The Registry Office,'" said Miss Munroe. "Pardon! go on; how charming!"

"Very. There are complications of course," continued Selkirk, "and, finally, the lovers manage to elope from a ball, which is kept up till nearly four in the morning, and get married at the registrar's office; and in order to throw her father and Jasper off the scent, Geraldine promises to marry the latter if he'll give her a certain paper 'in the hour she is wedded.' She and Lucille, wrapped in cloaks, then steal away, meet the lover and his servant, and drive off—a long distance, one gathers—to the registrar's house. However, presently the lady is missed by Sir Jasper; he somehow finds out the direction, and follows. That closes that act. Then comes the scene at the office," touching his programme, "when, of course, he arrives too late. Ah, look! there goes the green curtain; what a pretty act-drop!"

The buzz of tongues hushed in expectation as the band stopped. Mr. Graham dropped into his seat beside Sir Bertram de L'Orme, and up went the act-drop on a very pretty open-air scene with—painted—river and moored boat in the background, and on the grass, near the footlights, a girl and her lover, both in most becoming boating dress. There was a burst of applause, and Mr. Graham whispered to his friend, "By Jove, De L'Orme, your boy is a handsome fellow." The baronet's cheek glowed with pride. Praise his boy, and you won his heart. But the next remark he heard from some one behind him, "They both play so naturally," very naturally vexed him.

"Yes," came the reply, "that's one of Gabrielle Fane's great charms—always so natural—the perfection of art."

"Ah—yes, and her high character—never heard any one dare to seriously impugn her."

"No—and she works so hard, poor child; not a creature in the world to protect or stand by her, either."

A wave—a big wave, too—of pity and admiration swept over the baronet's heart, despite himself; he bit his lip angrily, but he



could not help watching the play as it progressed with deepening interest in the fate of the lovers, struggling against the schemes of the ruthless, vulgar Sir Jasper, and by the time the second act closed with this villain's discovery of the lovers' flight and the pursuit the old gentleman had worked himself up to a pitch of considerable excitement.

"I say, Audley, did you twig your governor?" said Jack as they went off, leaving the stage to be set for the last act; "he's as interested as a boy, I declare; wonder if he'll have the ghost of a suspicion of the realism of the last act?"

"Don't think so," returned the other. "You see, just when the names are said, my rival will be galloping madly up the road behind, and I've tipped that imp of a call-boy to prance in, and the minute my William exclaims that he hears hoof strokes, and if he hears a cough, he is to tumble down or pinch the maid." Here both scamps went off into choking laughter, and Gabrielle turned, half amused, half trembling, now that *the* moment was approaching.

"Pinch the poor maid! What for?" said she.

"To cause a noise behind the scenes, my dear, and partially drown the names in front," said her lover, as Jack moved away.

"Oh! Audley, isn't it too—too wicked of us?" She was very white; her lips quivered, and her lover bent down, putting his hand on her shoulder.

"My darling!" he whispered tenderly, "are you afraid of yourself, or that the *pater* won't forgive me? Never fear, dearest; there was no choice but this or parting, and it is too late now for us to draw back."

"Yes—yes—I know"—her breast heaved; her little hand clung to his—"and—and—I would not part. Forgive me, dear Audley; I am strong again; I shall not fail you."

"It is rather wicked," muttered Audley, turning away—"dear old father! but I could not give her up—and for no valid reason—even for him!"

## CHAPTER V.

### THE LAST ACT.

AND now the audience settled themselves in expectant attention, and Mr. Graham, lawyer-like, gave especial heed, observing merrily to a brother barrister behind:

"I expect there'll be some funny law and original formulæ in this last scene, such as only plays and novels know."

"Ha, ha! yes, unless Jack has set it right," returned the learned Q.C., thus verifying that

"Many a shot at random sent  
Finds mark the archer little meant."

There was no fault to find with the setting of the registry office presented when the act-drop rattled up, save perhaps that certainly the chairs and official-looking *secrétaire* were rather handsome for the purpose, being cribbed from Mr. Graham's own library. On the table lay a ledger, writing paper, pens, ink, &c. Then enter the registrar (Jack), sits down at the table, and opens the big register, soliloquizing: "A quarter past eight, and my sister Lucille wrote me to be sure to be ready by eight! but it's a long drive, and if the ball was not over till five or six, or suppose the fugitives have been overtaken—by Jove! Captain Fancourt would out with his revolver before he'd let 'em take my Lady Geraldine—ha!" (starts up), "here they are, thank Heaven! I hear his voice below."

The next moment, enter Austin Fancourt, leading Lady Geraldine, and followed by Lucille and the faithful manservant. It was only a natural piece of business that the lady's lover should himself unfasten the cloak which covered the rich sweeping ball-robe, speaking the words in his part, but as he bent down only Gabrielle heard the tender whisper, "Courage, my own darling! it will soon be over; trust me."

Whatever Gabrielle felt, the actress came to the aid of the woman, and well might Lady Ogilvie whisper to Mrs. Graham, who was next her, "How perfectly that girl plays her part, tempted to a reckless step by her bold lover, but just the right touch of girlish shyness and half reluctance."

"Yes," said Mrs. Graham, glancing towards her husband; he was watching the stage so intently that she was a trifle startled, for the bye-play and preliminary words with the registrar were over, and at his lines: "Now please, Captain Fancourt, all is ready," the two leading parties moved to the table opposite the official—what a handsome couple they were!—and in the pause Mr. Graham gave his old friend's face a quick glance.

"H'm!—doesn't quite like the situation," he thought; "too suggestive, and played so naturally."

Then he bent his whole attention again, the more so as the band began that vexing and most senseless undercurrent of accompaniment which often makes it difficult to hear every word on the stage, especially if any are spoken rather low, and both actors spoke the formula provokingly softly, so that even in the first row—and Mr. Graham was only in the second one—all was not distinctly heard. Then, in answer to the registrar's call for the required declaration:

Captain Fancourt—"I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I—Au——" (names not distinct, in part owing to loud and distant sounds of horse galloping behind the scenes—oh, that impish boy!) "may not be joined in matrimony to G——" (ditto, galloping a little nearer).

The girl's declaration had the same fate, but when the bridegroom spoke again—"I call upon those present to witness that I, A——" (what an irritating horse unseen that was!) "do take thee, Ga——" (a tumble behind and a sharp "Be 'anged!") Mr. Graham moved uneasily—what names had he caught?—not Austin, not Geraldine—"to be my lawful wedded wife."

Then came a similar speech (and louder galloping behind) from the bride, but now Mr. Graham drew in a long breath, muttering, "Good heavens!—no—my ears have *not* deceived me, I'm sure."

He went hot and cold, but dared not move, and stole a glance again at Sir Bertram, then at his wife, and he met her startled eyes.

Sir Bertram whispered vexedly to his host, "I couldn't quite catch some of the speeches or names—seemed a muddle—forgot their lines—eh?"

"Perhaps—oh! look."

Captain Fancourt, with a smile, was placing the ring on the Lady Geraldine's hand, and both signed the ledger first, then the witnesses, man and lady's-maid, all realistically correct, and then the registrar signed book and certificate, handing the latter to the Captain, with this gagged remark, "Now, sir, it's done safe."

Of course at that auspicious moment rapid footsteps, an angry voice, are heard, and in rushes the rival, Sir Jasper, hot, dusty, furious. Fancourt throws himself before his bride, but surely that look in the handsome face, the force and emphasis of his words, are all Audley's own and beyond acting.

"Stand back, Sir Jasper ; you are just too late, for this lady is my wife, by all the law of this land, though you may choose to think it only a comedy."

An odd vague kind of *frémissement* ran through the audience. Selkirk went, under breath, "Whew ! he's too strong for private theatricals, by Jove !"

Sir Bertram paled suddenly, moved as if to rise, then leaned back, muttering, "Yes, yes, of course it is only a comedy."

But Mr. Graham bit his lips, with the mental question—"What madcap game have those two young scamps been up to ? I'll give it you, Jack, if——" he turned to the stage again just as Fancourt forces Sir Jasper to give up the paper, mockingly bidding him go back whence he came for a laggard.

"Ride fast, sir !"—as Audley spoke the concluding speech of the play, he took Gabrielle's hand, and turned half to his play-rival, half towards the house—"Go tell the world that you were just too late—not to stop, but to witness, as binding a marriage as ever the laws of this realm recognize."

Down came the curtain on these words, amidst an outburst of applause, and the excitement shut in found a vent. Sir Bertram rose up unmistakably agitated, and took Graham's arm with a stern whisper—"Come round ; I *must* see the boy at once."

Mrs. Graham said quietly to her husband, as the guests broke up into groups, "I'll have the seats cleared, and start dancing, John."

He nodded, and went out with his friend towards the room used as a green-room.

"You've done it this time, Audley, by Jove," exclaimed Jack with a smothered laugh, as they all retreated to the *foyer*. "That last 'gag' fetched 'em down, and our governors are *en chemin* for this crib."

"Oh ! Audley," said the actress, white to the lips, "for my sake let anything pass he says of me."

"Darling, trust to me. Ha ! now for the battle royal."

The door was flung wide, and father and son were face to face.

"What, in Heaven's name, does all this night's comedy mean, Audley ? Are you attempting for a moment to deceive me and that girl into the belief that that play-marriage is legal ?"

"No, no, father !" exclaimed Audley, flushing to the brow. "You cannot really think that of me. There is no deception, and it is all my doing, for I persuaded Gabrielle. The marriage is no

play, but real, according to civil law, and Gabrielle is my wife. Listen—hear me a minute, dear father!”—and now the young man stepped forward, and clasped the old man’s hand, deeply moved, with pleading eyes and voice—ah! so like his dead mother—so very like—“you have a right to be angry, perhaps, but I knew you would not consent after what you said—never—and we loved each other! How could I give her up, father? and I was desperate: I thought of this; it was openly done at least, and I persuaded her to the step. Won’t you forgive me, father?”

Poor Sir Bertram! his obstinacy and passion pulled one way; his whole heart pulled the very opposite way, the unadmitted consciousness of which made him all the more angry, just to persuade himself that he did not yearn to forgive this wildest escapade and make his boy happy. But, like Pharaoh, he hardened (or tried to harden) his heart.

“I wonder you dare to ask it, boy,” he said, tearing his hand away. “You think you have made a safe knot of it that I can’t break, but we’ll see that. Graham, you’re a lawyer, and perhaps that boy and Miss Fane will believe you if you tell them it’s a mere mockery.”

Audley glanced quickly from Jack to Helen in the background as he drew back to Gabrielle’s side, but Mr. Graham, looking severely at his son, said shortly, “Bring me that play-registry ledger, Jack.”

There was a pause whilst Jack silently fetched it and laid it on the table, open still at the fatal page.

“Audley, give me that play-certificate,” said the lawyer, and, as the young fellow obeyed, “What names did you and Miss Fane really give on the stage?”

“Our own,” said Audley quietly. “Jack and Helen and my man all heard us distinctly, and can swear to it.”

“Ah! I thought I did too,” muttered Mr. Graham as he looked at the paper and book

Then he started and changed countenance; all the real names were signed, not the stage ones. One loophole remained.

“Even this won’t hold, my young friend,” he said sternly, “unless the fullest intention of actual marriage, not mere acting, is proved beyond doubt.”

That wicked smile flashed up into Audley’s eyes again as he drew a paper from his breast, and put it into the lawyer’s hand.

"Will that do?" he asked, in the softest manner, "and we have been twenty-one days in Scotland, too, you know."

The paper was a legally worded declaration, in Jack's writing, stating the undersigned's full intentions that the registry marriage between them in the comedy "Just too Late," to be acted by them on Christmas Day, should be a real, true, and binding marriage, and no mockery, jest, or play-acting. It was duly signed, and witnessed by Jack and Helen.

Mr. Graham read it, and breathed a long soft "Whew!" that spoke a volume, then turned and looked at his old friend as he stood intently watching his face.

"De L'Orme, the young scamp's got the right side of the law this time, safe enough; it is a 'Scotch marriage' as tight as ever was riveted; there is nothing to be done—legally; you cannot undo it."

There was a dead silence; then a mist came before the old man's eyes, and a tremulousness to his lips, as he felt his two hands taken with hands young and warm, and soft, low tones (a little unsteady) stole on his ear, that were as the very echo of the loved one gone before—"Dear father, as you loved my mother, so do I love my wife. Give her to me in church this Christmas-tide, for my mother's sake, and forgive—her son——"

"Ah, Audley—Audley, what can I do against this plea but forgive you both?"

The grey head was bowed for a moment on the son's shoulder, the hands close locked; then the old man lifted himself, and stretched out his arms to Gabrielle.

"Come to me, my child—poor little one!"

She threw herself, with a half-sob, into the old man's arms, clinging about his neck.

"Father! dear father! you *will* love me a little, for Audley's sake!"

Mrs. Graham, with true feminine courage, had risen to the situation, got both salons cleared for dancing, talked, laughed, and kept things going generally; but still, under the gay surface, every one felt that something had occurred in the play that was certainly not only a comedy, and were on the tip-toe of expectation to know what it all meant. Mrs. Graham pretty well guessed, and her dear motherly heart beat fast for the young people's fate, when a kind of sensation through the crowd of



guests, a quick turning toward the door, made her too look, and instantly go forwards.

Fine and stalwart, and proudly erect, in came Sir Bertram de L'Orme with the young actress leaning on his arm, and followed by his handsome son, the two Grahams, and bonnie Nell Forrest.

"Dear Mrs. Graham," said Sir Bertram, with his inimitable old *régime* bow, and every word clearly heard by all the company, "pardon our long absence, and permit me"—glancing over the crowd with a smile that was good to see—"to present to you my son's wife, whose 'Scotch marriage' we have all of us unknowingly witnessed in this last hour"—a burst of applause bubbled up here—"I must frankly confess that I had objected to his choice simply—being an old-fashioned being, I suppose—because this dear girl" (another clapping, from the men especially) "was on the stage, but I cannot now regret that—quite the reverse—that my wicked young scamp here has unquestionably got the best of his old father. What is done can't be undone, we know, and I don't want it undone either, since I have now a loving daughter as well as son" (applause). "Of course we, being staunch Church people, cannot recognize any true binding save His above to make twain one flesh, and so within this happy octave of Christmas we shall bid as many of our kind friends here who will honour us to witness my son's marriage in St. Catherine's Church, close by."

A ringing cheer broke forth, another, and another.

"Three for the bride and bridegroom!"—and then—"Three for glorious Sir Bertram!"—and then up struck the band's gay strains, and Mr. Graham, stepping forwards, took the fair bride's hand and led off the dance right merrily.

"Oh! the rush of the tripping feet,  
Oh! the lightsome hearts that beat,  
Wild and glad the merry time."

\* \* \* \*

What a happy Christmas-tide that was that within its octave saw young Audley de L'Orme and his beautiful Gabrielle wed in the dear old church, given away by his beloved father himself! but Jack, who was best man of course, always maintains laughingly that *he* married them that Christmas night when the play was not "Only a Comedy."

## **Homburg Beauty.**

A NOVEL.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

Author of "A CRACK COUNTY," "MATRON OR MAID," "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE MYSTERY OF A WOMAN'S HEART," etc., etc.

### **CHAPTER XXVII.**

#### **LORD O'BANASHEE'S GARDEN PARTY.**

DISSIPATIONS followed each other fast. No sooner were the Frankfort races over than half the female hearts in Homburg were set a-fluttering by the prospect of Lord O'Banashee's garden party. Rumour whispered that the entertainment was to be on a magnificent scale. Herr Goldmann, of the Hôtel de l'Europe, had received instructions to provide refreshments for two hundred and fifty people, and nearly every four-wheeled conveyance in the town was chartered beforehand, in order to convey the guests to and from the scene of festivities. Lord O'Banashee, so it was reported, had hired a large meadow close to the celebrated "Tannen-Wald," or Pine-wood, and here numerous workmen were already at work putting up tents, arranging chairs, benches, &c. Every one said it was to be the grandest affair of the sort ever given in Homburg, and at the Wells of a morning folk talked of nothing else. "I'm going. Are you? Oh, what a pity! You should get an invitation." That was the burden of the conversation.

As for Lord O'Banashee, he had a real good time of it. The deference paid him was something astonishing. He found himself literally besieged for invitations, and all the young and pretty women in the place, who had not already the honour of his acquaintance, did their utmost to obtain an introduction. Wherever he went he was greeted with smiles and bows. In fact, the fair sex made open and unblushing love to him.

And all because of his garden party! He was quite sharp enough to know that, and in his cynical heart despised the very

butterflies he professed most to admire, and who were so ready to flaunt their attractions for the sake of an invitation. But amidst the flattery he received, to his no small credit, he kept his head. In many respects it was a very shrewd one, and in giving the party he had an object in view, which he never lost sight of for a moment. That object was to please His Serene Highness, and still further ingratiate himself in his good graces. To secure this end, it was indispensable that none but good-looking and amusing women should be asked. If there was a thing the Prince hated more than another, it was being bored. He liked to throw off Court etiquette and enjoy himself in a simple, hearty way. He did not care who people were, so long as they were nice to look at or lively to talk to.

Lord O'Banashee was quite aware of this fact, and taking all the circumstances into consideration, he did not feel himself in a position to invite old friends of his own. He treated them with extra courtesy when he met them, and—left them out. To do him justice, he behaved with remarkable circumspection, and though his old friends abused him, he made any number of new ones, many of whom, thanks to his having climbed the social ladder so successfully, were more to his taste. His first act was to concoct a list of the ladies likely to prove agreeable to Prince Friskovitch. This he submitted to His Highness, begging him to add or strike out what names he pleased. The Prince most graciously consented to undertake the task, whereupon Lord O'Banashee, having made sure that he had not fallen into any blunder, proceeded to send out the invitations. Then was there joy in some hearts, despair and envy in others. It was so horrible to have to confess: "No, I'm not going. I've not been asked." The elder ladies, of course, declared they wouldn't have gone if they could. The whole thing was much too free and easy for their taste. But the girls had no such balm to apply to their wounded feelings, for even had they entertained similar sentiments of disapproval, they knew well enough that nobody would believe them.

Hetty and Amelia were fortunate. Thanks to having found favour in Prince Friskovitch's eyes, they were among the recipients of the ardently desired invitations. Mrs. Davidson's mortification was intense when she found that no mention was made on the card either of herself or of Mr. Davidson.

"I won't let Hetty go," she declared, venting her ill-humour upon her daughter. "It's downright insulting of Lord O'Banashee to leave me out in this way, especially when I've been introduced to him, and everything."

"I hear that others who have known him much longer than you, Emma, also profess great discontent," said Mr. Davidson. "I met a man at the Wells only this morning who had been an intimate friend of Lord O'Banashee all his life. He complained loudly and bitterly of being ignored, and apparently with some cause. That a single member of our family should have received an invitation is, doubtless, a great honour, if only we look at matters in their proper light."

"Honour! Where on earth is the honour? Do you call it an honour for a young girl of Hetty's age to be asked about without her mother and father? Who knows what mischief she may not be up to? She's foolish enough for anything."

"I have more belief in Hetty's common-sense than you," returned Mr. Davidson, looking proudly at his daughter, and thinking of the time when she would be Lady Charles Mountgard. "The girl's not so stupid as you try to make out."

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Davidson, "all I can say is, that if Hetty possesses a spark of proper feeling or of respect for me, she won't want to go to this entertainment. I'm sure I wouldn't if *my* mother had been treated in such an abominable manner. What's an insult to one is an insult to all when people belong to the same family—at least in my opinion, though really, now-a-days, the world seems topsy-turvy."

Hetty looked rather guilty and uncomfortable at this speech. In spite of her mother's words, she wanted immensely to go to Lord O'Banashee's party, though not so much on Prince Friskovitch's account as on Karl's.

Young ladies, as is generally the case, were in greater force at Homburg than young men. Lord O'Banashee experienced considerable difficulty in securing a sufficient number of the latter. They were scarce—decidedly scarce. He had therefore invited Karl Von Kessler, who, since his victory and the public congratulations of His Serene Highness on the Kursaal Terrace two nights afterwards, had become quite a personage.

Knowing that Karl was amongst the guests, Hetty hung her head and said nothing. Her silence had the unfortunate effect of

still further incensing Mrs. Davidson, who by this time was in a most captious mood.

"I believe you are wicked enough and bad-hearted enough to want to go to this wretched affair," she said acridly. "Oh! don't pretend to deceive me—I can tell fast enough! You are a naughty, unnatural girl to care only for your own selfish pleasure, and not to resent the manner in which your parents are treated. It shows a very nasty spirit on your part—a very nasty spirit indeed, and I hope the time may never come when you will have cause to regret it."

"Nonsense, Emma!" here interrupted Mr. Davidson, who looked at matters from a less personal, and consequently fairer, point of view; "you don't know what you are talking about."

"Don't I, indeed! It seems to me I am the only one of the whole party who has any sense."

"Let the child enjoy herself whilst she can. Lord Charles' aunt, Lady Barbara Winkeyton, has just arrived on a visit to her nephew, and I hear has kindly undertaken to chaperon all the young ladies. If that is not good enough for you I don't know what is."

"And I tell you, John, that a girl's own mother is the person to look after her. You refuse, as usual, to listen to my advice, but I warn you solemnly that mischief will come of this. Hetty is not fit to be trusted alone. However, if you insist on backing her up against me, I give in. A woman always has to, but I give in under protest. Please remember that when my presentiments become realized."

"Pooh, pooh, my dear Emma!" he rejoined. "You are making a mountain out of a molehill. One must stretch a point sometimes. I don't mean to say that either you or I would approve of a young girl like Hetty always going about by herself, but this is an exceptional case. Moreover, she will be surrounded by friends who are sure to take good care of her. Indeed, Lord Charles has already promised to do so."

And he winked significantly at his better half, but Mrs. Davidson, though quite aware of her husband's schemes, refused to meet his look. She could not get over the disappointment of not having received an invitation, and an unnatural jealousy of Hetty filled her breast. As previously stated, she was one of those women entirely destitute of maternal affection, and her daughter's

successes, instead of inspiring a sense of pride, produced a feeling of envy bordering on positive dislike. Hetty shot a grateful glance at her father. Of late he had proved her friend more than once, and she knew that, thanks to his aid, the battle was won.

"May I write and accept his lordship's invitation?" she asked gaily.

"Yes," he answered, "most certainly. I have more confidence in you than your mother, and trust to you to do nothing foolish."

Like Lord O'Banashee, Mr. Davidson had an object in view. He wanted Hetty to marry Lord Charles, and to effect so desirable an end he deemed it of the utmost importance that the young people should be thrown together as much as possible. As long as this result could be achieved, it mattered little whether one person chaperoned her or another. Once Lady Charles Mountgard, and henceforth her position was assured. He wished her well in his way, and honestly endeavoured to secure her happiness. He was sensible enough, too, to realize that in the fine company to which his daughter was rapidly being promoted he and Mrs. Davidson were somewhat out of place. He had mixed very little with modern society, but, for all that, he was a shrewd, hard-headed man of the world, capable of seeing things as they really were. And he saw that Lord Charles was genuinely in love with Hetty, and would prove a brilliant match from every point of view.

Little did he know that Love already trembled in her heart like a dewdrop poised quiveringly on the soft, unfolding leaves of a fresh rosebud. The girl looked forward to meeting Karl with vague but passionate yearning. Her whole being seemed drawn towards him, as a needle towards a magnet. Her will was paralyzed, thought a physical impossibility. She felt as if some great strong current were sweeping her onwards towards a crisis in her life which she was powerless to avert. Helpless as a withered leaf driven by the impetuous flow of rushing water, so was she, a human being imprisoned in the relentless grasp of Destiny.

When the eventful day arrived, the weather again proved favourable. The heat continued unabated, and no agitating question arose in female minds as to the propriety of donning light frocks or dark, best hats or ones that had already seen some

service. It was so distinctly fine that waterproofs and umbrellas never came in for a moment's consideration. From early morning the little town lay bathed in sunshine. The pavements were white and glaring, the shops hidden beneath outside blinds, and even the thick foliage of the trees in the Park could not altogether screen the sun's fierce rays, which here and there were beginning to tinge it with yellow before its time. Lord O'Banashee was lucky in this respect, for if the day had been made to order, it could not have been more absolutely and brilliantly perfect.

Somewhere about half-past one o'clock a long procession of carriages began to block the Luisen Strasse. The horses stood nodding in the heat, occasionally whisking away a troublesome fly with their long tails, whilst drivers lounged on box seats, also half asleep. Lord O'Banashee, as host, was the first to arrive. He looked quite juvenile and jaunty, thanks to a light grey frock coat, a silver-grey tie, and a fragrant buttonhole consisting of white stephanotis and maidenhair fern. Had he been going to the matrimonial altar, his costume could not have been more correct. His face beamed with gratified pride as one after the other he greeted ladies and gentlemen of rank belonging to the gay world of fashion, and, bestowing a few words on each, told them off to their respective carriages. Considering that the whole burden of the arrangements fell on his shoulders, he managed very creditably, and did not jumble people up more incongruously than at any London dinner party. In all cases he went on the principle of separating husband from wife, being aware of the fact that in these days it is derogatory to the woman for a united couple to be seen together in public.

Last of all Prince Friskovitch dashed up, in the same break he had occupied at the races. With him were the reigning favourites, Mrs. Crown-Shuffer and Mrs. Patman, both gorgeously attired, and the former with cheeks and fringe even a shade more brilliant than usual. A couple of gentlemen were likewise seated in the royal carriage, but the Prince, with commendable foresight, had purposely kept a vacant place in case something very lovely or amusing in the feminine way should turn up. While all this was going on, Hetty stood shyly beneath the portico of the hotel. Being neither a duchess nor a marchioness, Lord O'Banashee had apparently forgotten her existence. He had provided for Karl, Lord Charles, and Amelia, without even allowing them time



to exchange a word with her. She began to think that the procession would start and leave her behind, and felt very forlorn, in spite of her father's presence.

The Prince jumped to the ground in order to shake hands with his host, and inform him there was a seat in the break at his disposal. Suddenly his eye fell upon Hetty. Fair and virginal she looked, dressed in a simple costume of soft white muslin, which displayed to perfection the graceful lines of her symmetrical form. His Highness saw and approved, and Lord O'Banashee, catching the direction of the Royal glance, saw and approved also.

"I think we could make room for one more. You don't mind being a bit squeezed, O'Banashee, do you?"

"Certainly not, sir. The more the merrier, and a pretty girl is always welcome."

"How do you do, Miss Davidson?" said Prince Friskovitch, in his hearty, genial manner. "What are all the young fellows about to leave you standing here? Where are their eyes, I wonder? If you really have not got a pet cavalier, will you put up with a sober married man, and come with me in my carriage?"

Mr. Davidson, old as he was, coloured up with pleasure. This was indeed a moment of triumph. Hetty made a deep courtesy, and the next minute Prince Friskovitch helped her into the break, saying to Mrs. Patman as he did so:

"Do you mind moving up one? Ah! thank you, thank you very much indeed. And now I think we are full."

Lord O'Banashee scrambled in, the door was shut with a bang, and Hetty found herself tightly wedged between the Prince on one side and his lordship on the other. Mrs. Patman, whom all unconsciously she had deposed, gazed sourly at her, and seemed, in the girl's excited imagination, to be taking a mental inventory of her clothes. Her prolonged stare, combined with Mrs. Crown-Shuffer's loud laugh and strange conversation, different from any she was accustomed to hear, prevented Hetty from enjoying the situation.

His Highness was as usual kindness itself, and Lord O'Banashee's compliments were more fulsome and ornate than ever; but all the same she experienced an uncomfortable sensation of being out of her element. Mrs. Crown-Shuffer's jokes—but more especially those which called for the highest commendation—were

quite beyond her comprehension. The few she understood brought hot blushes to her cheek ; but as nobody else blushed, she thought she must be a fool for doing so. The Prince, in particular, appeared so amused that it convinced her as to the propriety of the general proceedings and her own ignorance. The latter, as it always did, produced such a sense of depression that she sat silent most of the way, finding occupation for her nervous fingers in twiddling and untwiddling the corner of her lace pocket-handkerchief. But struggle against the feeling of shame as she might, it grew and grew, and her face burnt more and more, until at last, when they arrived at their destination, she descended from the break as from a prison. The fact was, she was not used to such high honours, and they stifled her. Thus she accounted for the constraint and uneasiness occasioned by the drive. Although she had sat next Prince Friskovitch, universally admitted to be the most fascinating and agreeable man in Europe, who had the power of adapting himself to all society, and who was beloved by the lowest as well as the highest, she had not enjoyed herself one bit. She liked him, and fully-recognized his wonderful charm of manner, but she did not like his surroundings. In her unsophisticated eyes they appeared strange, and she infinitely preferred her Karl.

Nothing could be more lavish than the arrangements made by Lord O'Banashee on his guests' behalf. As soon as the party were all collected, they sat down to a cold collation of the most sumptuous kind. Champagne ran like water. There was no stint of it, and corks could be heard popping and seen flying in every direction.

An Englishman's idea of a day's pleasuring is always to eat first and enjoy himself afterwards, and this order was religiously adhered to on the present occasion. His Highness possessed an excellent appetite, and he had laughed so much on the road, that he was more than commonly hungry. The dust, too, had got down his throat from the same cause, and rendered him thirsty. A hum of conversation soon arose, accompanied by loud peals of laughter, which became more accentuated as the meal progressed. Every one was merry, but none more so than the royal party. What between Mrs. Crown-Shuffer's good stories, which grew better and better, Lord O'Banashee's gallantries, and His Highness's wit and well-known humour, the repast proved a great

success ; and the host, seeing how well things were going, did not regret the outlay to which he had been put. To pay your money and have a dull party into the bargain is an awful experience to the giver.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE REIGNING FAVOURITES FALL OUT.

AT length, when no one felt inclined to eat or drink any more, a move was made from the tent into the soft, warm air outside. Close to the grassy meadow, steeped in dazzling sunshine, stood the "Tannen Wald." The tall crowns of the stately pines soared dark and majestic into the serene blue sky. Their rounded trunks, shorn of the lower branches, which had all been lopped off to serve as supports for the fruit trees, resembled the aisles of a cathedral. Row after row greeted the eye, whichever way it turned. So closely planted were these slender columns, some grey in hue, some brown, some almost pink, that the light penetrated with difficulty, and when the narrow road cut its way into the shy recesses of the wood, the effect was similar to a long and gloomy tunnel, through which the sunshine peered faintly at either end. The air was fragrant with the pungent and resinous odour of the pines. Their stillness and repose formed a striking contrast to the sun-illuminated meadow, with its human occupants, who dotted it with colour. Several disjointed husbands and wives began to wander off to confide to sympathetic ears the misery of their domestic lives.

So far there had been no special novelty connected with Lord O'Banashee's entertainment beyond the lavish cost displayed. But now a surprise awaited everybody, except those two arch-conspirators, his lordship and Prince Friskovitch. It was announced that a number of valuable prizes in the shape of brooches, ear-rings, and bracelets were to be competed for amongst the ladies. A skipping-rope competition was one of the chief items of an extremely original programme, including high jumps and running, the whole finishing up with a sack race, distance two hundred yards, the winner to receive a diamond bangle. The fair sex listened, laughed, and consented. They had lunched, and they had champagned, and the idea was greeted with almost general approval. True, Lady Barbara looked severe and whis-

pered to her nephew: "Charlie, I had not a notion of this," but it was too late to offer any effectual remonstrances.

The skipping-rope contest was confined to ladies under thirty; and as very few owned to more, the entry was large. The prize consisted of a handsome pearl and diamond butterfly. How could the human butterflies possibly resist such a temptation? In no time a dozen skipping-ropes were produced, the gentlemen kindly undertaking to turn the handles, and amidst screams of laughter both from skippers and spectators, the game proceeded. The ladies bounced and jumped, grew red in the face, and—please don't be shocked—showed their neat boots and trim ankles with exceeding liberality. The gentlemen laughed and applauded, and kept twirling the ropes faster and faster. It might have been a scene out of a comedy. Anyhow, it was irresistibly ludicrous to see all these finely dressed, grown-up men and women amusing themselves in such a childish fashion.

The Prince was convulsed with merriment, and Lord O'Banashée strutted from one set of skippers to the other, proud of the consciousness that he had conceived and opened out a new source of pleasure to His Serene Highness.

The skipping and the sack race had both been inspirations for which he claimed the entire credit.

By some impulse for which she could not account, Hetty steadily refused to take part in the proceedings. Perhaps her father's words, "I trust to you not to do anything foolish," rang in her ears. Anyhow she stood aloof from the performers, looking on them with grave, wondering eyes. Suddenly she felt a light touch on her shoulder, and turning hastily round, found herself face to face with Karl Von Kessler.

"You do not like this?" he said inquiringly.

"No, not altogether. It's very amusing, but——" and she stopped short.

"Yes, yes, you are right," he said approvingly. "I am glad you refused to join these mad-caps. It was like you to do so. I should have been disappointed had you acted differently."

"Would you?" with a glow of gratification illumining her face.

"Yes. We men laugh at this sort of thing, but we do not like it really."

"Then you should not laugh. By laughing you encourage the evil."

"How can one help it?" said Karl as a stout, breathless young lady, catching her feet in the skipping-rope, fell violently to the ground, displaying a peep of something white, which looked suspiciously like an under-garment.

"Oh, come away, come away," cried Hetty, with a little shudder. "It's horrid. It makes me feel ashamed for my sex. The girls are foolish, but the men are worse; they egg them on."

Karl checked his hilarity. He saw that she was seriously distressed.

"Well, perhaps you're right. Let's be virtuous and tear ourselves away from this frolicsome scene. What do you say to a stroll in the Tannen Wald? It is deliciously cool there."

Hetty gladly signified her consent. To rove about alone with Karl was indeed bliss. They disappeared beneath the tall, straight stems of the pine trees, and soon were lost to vision. The dim religious light reminded Hetty of a sacred edifice. A sense of awe and of trembling expectancy stole over her spirit. Why did Karl look so tenderly at her? Had he something very special to say? Her heart beat fast at the thought. . . .

Whatever Karl communicated to her, or she to him, their confidences took a long time, for when they emerged from the deep shadows of the wood the games were drawing to a successful close.

Hetty's face was pale, and the serenity of its expression disturbed as if by some powerful emotion. Her companion, on the contrary, looked flushed and very determined, like a man who meets with opposition where none was expected, and sets to work by force to overcome the obstacle that opposes itself to his will.

"You have promised," he said excitedly. "Remember I have your promise. You cannot—will not go from it."

"Oh, Karl!" she rejoined, whilst a shiver ran through her frame. "I am afraid."

"Afraid! That's because you have no trust in me—because you do not love me."

"Do not say so. You know that it is not the truth. Have I not confessed my love? But this—this is so sudden."

"You have promised," he repeated moodily. "A person can't go back when once a thing has been said."

"Karl, you must not keep me to that promise. I made it without thinking. Give me time to consider——"

"To consider, and to withdraw. No, by Heaven! I won't do anything half so foolish."

She looked at him, and his great size and physical strength mesmerized her as they had done from the first.

"*Liebchen*," he whispered, drawing her towards her and impressing a long kiss on her dewy lips, "you will have courage for my sake. You will keep your promise, won't you?"

All rosy and abashed, confused but magnetically attracted towards him, she faltered "Yes." Then, with a sudden burst of passion, she added:

"Oh, Karl, be good to me, be good to me. For if I do as you wish, I shall need both your kindness and your love."

"Frightened child!" he said chidingly. "How could any one help being good to you?" As he spoke, there stole into his blue, metallic eyes the same triumphant gleam that had lit them up when Jerry O'Hagan received his memorable defeat.

When they returned to the meadow the sack race had just begun, and was evidently creating a vast amount of amusement. How the ladies got into the sacks must for ever remain a mystery, though Rumour reported that Lord O'Banashee, with his accustomed delicate forethought, had provided a quantity of leather straps, wherewith voluminous skirts were firmly bound. At all events the sacks were achieved somehow, for there the fair competitors were, struggling and falling, laughing and screaming, pushing shoving, and wriggling towards the goal. Curious objects they looked, with their pretty faces and smart hats peeping out from a coarse shroud of matting, unduly inflated at the back by the obnoxious but ubiquitous dress-improver. Strange products indeed of an advanced civilization, and of nineteenth century manners and customs.

By the time Hetty and Karl arrived on the scene, it was clear that the contest had resolved itself into a match between Mrs. Crown-Shuffer and Mrs. Patman. The animosity which these ladies had long entertained for each other in secret appeared to find an outlet in their frantic struggles to reach the goal, represented by Prince Friskovitch's walking stick. All the spirit of emulation, for which the fair sex are proverbial, was evidently aroused in full force. The Prince himself, surrounded by a group of gentlemen, incited the competitors to fresh effort, cheering them by turns, as first one, then the other, gained a slight advan-



tage. Between Mrs. Patman and Mrs. Crown-Shuffer there was no love lost. They were four or five yards ahead of every one else. It was a hand-to-hand fight. How they struggled, wriggled, and panted. All the brute element was aroused within them. They were no longer delicate ladies, but savages wrestling for supremacy. Mrs. Crown-Shuffer's golden fringe came right down over her eyes. Alas! she had no hands wherewith to push it back into place. The colour on Mrs. Patman's cheek deepened and spread, until her pretty babyish face looked almost coarse. She was more active than her opponent, or perhaps less tightly bound. Anyhow she gained an inch or two. The winning post was quite close now, and in addition to the honour and glory, the winner was to receive an exquisite diamond bangle, said to have cost no less than two thousand marks. It was worth while making valiant efforts to secure so handsome a prize. Apparently Mrs. Crown-Shuffer held the same opinion. Though so charming to the world at large, it was whispered that the Divine Clarissa had a tolerably fierce temper in private life. Her husband and publisher were both afraid of her. Mrs. Patman gave a convulsive wriggle, which, though not elegant, brought her still nearer to the goal. At this juncture, an access of rage seemed suddenly to descend upon Mrs. Crown-Shuffer's spirit. She uttered a fierce little cry—a cry that had something almost bestial in its nature—and with a leap as of a wild animal, hurled herself against Mrs. Patman. The latter, bound and encumbered as she was, tottered, and would have fallen to the ground had not one of the gentlemen rushed to her assistance.

The act was so swift, so audacious, that it went almost unperceived, and Mrs. Crown-Shuffer, gathering all her forces together, was proclaimed the winner.

Trembling with passion, indifferent in her present mood of bitter resentment to what she said or did, Mrs. Patman managed to undo the cord which confined the sack round her neck, and stepped out of it.

"How dare you cheat in that abominable manner?" she said to Mrs. Crown-Shuffer, in a voice quivering with indignation. "I was winning easily had you not purposely tried to knock me down."

'Calm yourself, my dear,' retorted the poetess, with mocking effrontery. "You don't look well when you are in a rage. Very



few women do, but it is particularly unbecoming to your dolly style of beauty."

"You have no right to that bracelet, no more right to it than the man in the moon," said Mrs. Patman.

"Right to it? Well! perhaps not. Who has a right to anything in this world? I wanted it, and so I got it."

"But you will have to give it up. You shall be made to—yes, made to," clenching her little fists.

"Not I. I would like to see the man or the woman capable of making me part with a thing against my will. No, no, my dear little Mrs. P., you don't know me."

"I know you a great deal too well. You are an impudent, wicked woman, and I wish to goodness I had never set eyes on you." And Mrs. Patman's naturally soft voice sounded quite shrill and harsh.

"Very possibly, but that wish comes rather late to be of much service. We have dined together and supped together too often not to be tolerably intimate." So saying, Mrs. Crown-Shuffer showed all her beautiful white teeth in a grin that did not, however, add to the attractions of her bold, painted, yet withal handsome face. Mrs. Patman's invectives sank home. It was not nice to be called bad names in public, especially when she was trying so hard to obtain a footing in really good society.

That grin drove her ladyship wild. To be sneered at by Mrs. Crown-Shuffer was more than she could stand, though of late days she had put up with a good deal.

"Prince Friskovitch," she cried, appealing to His Serene Highness, who stood listening to this quarrel between the reigning favourites with a displeased expression of countenance, "I ask you to see that justice is done, and to order this woman from the ground."

"Mrs. Patman," he said coldly, "pray consider your language, and do not make a scene in public. If it is the loss of the bracelet you regret, allow me to present you with another."

"I wouldn't take it. Nothing would induce me to take it," she screamed excitedly. "You misunderstand me altogether."

He shrugged his shoulders. For some time past he had begun to think her rather a silly little woman. Now he was sure of it.

"In that case I must remind you that I cannot consent to act as umpire in any quarrel. It is most regrettable that the harmony

of an otherwise delightful afternoon should have been destroyed in such an unseemly and deplorable fashion." With these words His Highness turned away.

The wretched woman trembled from top to toe. She knew that the Prince, with all his good-nature, was not one to put up with an affront. Now he was deeply offended, and, worse still, she saw when too late that she had simply been playing into the hands of her unscrupulous adversary, who stood there, watching her defeat with the cold, glittering eyes of a reptile.

Then, all of a sudden, the thought of her boy, her little innocent boy, left lonely in his nursery at home, deprived of a mother's tender care and solicitude, flashed into her brain like a burning flame. It roused the best and noblest part of her nature, making it revolt against the vain and frivolous portion. A fierce revulsion of feeling set in. The part which she had but so recently played appeared to her in its true light—mean, paltry, and ignoble. She clasped her hands together in an agony of remorse, and, careless of all beholders, burst into a flood of passionate tears. She had reached the stage—a most bitter and humiliating one for any woman—when she was past minding what people said of her.

As she stood thus, with head bent and shaking form, some one touched her on the shoulder. She looked round guiltily and saw Lord Charles Mountgard. He had never been a friend of hers. She had rather disliked him than otherwise, having felt instinctively that he disapproved of her conduct. Now there was a look on his face—a look of tenderness and compassion—which made her tears gush forth afresh.

"Come away," he said gently. "This is no place for you. I will see you home."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," she sobbed. "I am so miserable. I wish to goodness I were dead."

"Hush! you must not say that. Things all pass away and are forgotten, if only one has patience."

"But it was my own fault—my own fault from the ve—very beginning. That makes it so m—much harder to bear. I've been such a f—f—fo—o—l."

"Dear Mrs. Patman," he said, "compose yourself if you can, and do not call yourself hard names. We are none of us very wise at times. Come, leave off crying. You know how ill-

natured people are, and we don't want their tongues set wagging if we can possibly avoid it."

She felt his kindness, and shot a timid glance of gratitude at him. His face was pale and very grave. Something about the extreme seriousness of its expression awed her, and made her realize that perhaps others had troubles beside herself. She took out her pocket-handkerchief and wiped her eyes.

"You are very good to me," she said softly. "I wonder what makes you so good to me, Lord Charles?"

"Only because I can't bear to see a woman in trouble, and also ——" stopping short.

"Please go on. Don't spare my feelings. I deserve no consideration."

"And also because I refuse to believe any real evil of you. You are young and vain, after the manner of pretty women; and your vanity has led you away and rendered you, perhaps, just a little foolish."

"A *little* foolish!" she cried bitterly. "Ah, if you only knew! Lord Charles, I will not deceive you. Thank Heaven, I am not really bad—you are right there—but I have gone very near to ruining my self-respect, and rendering myself unworthy of my boy's love. Since I came here my life has been a dream—a false and horrible dream—which cast a kind of glamour over my senses. Well, I have had a lesson, and a cruel one. Please God I may profit by it." And she wiped the tears away from her wet cheeks.

Lord Charles felt a lump rise in his throat. He had judged her rightly after all. With almost fatherly care he helped her into the nearest carriage and ordered the driver to drive back to Homburg.

"What!" she exclaimed in surprise. "Are you coming, too?"

"Yes," he said, flinging himself down wearily on the cushions by her side. "I am disgusted with the whole thing. Some people may like to see women making fools of themselves, but I don't." Then he remembered, and, turning very red, added, "I beg you ten thousand pardons. I was not thinking of what I was saying."

"Don't apologize to me," she rejoined, in deep self-abasement. "You said nothing but what was right. I am sorry, however, that you should have enjoyed yourself so little."

"I saw nothing to enjoy," he returned, and then they relapsed into silence, and scarcely spoke another word.

The fact was, Lord Charles was greatly upset. It had been an immense relief to his feelings to find that Hetty did not participate in the games; but, if questioned, he alone out of all the guests could have told the exact time she had spent in the "Tannen Wald" with Herr Von Kessler. He saw them go in, and he saw them come back, and a great trouble entered into his heart there and then. It was a trouble that he could only put at rest in one way. This he fully realized. Henceforth delay was fatal.

Directly he returned to his hotel, he therefore determined to write a note to Mr. Davidson, begging him to grant him an interview on the following afternoon.

This was the proper, straightforward, and honourable thing to do, and he should do it.

All that stealing off into the woods and making underhand love to a child not out of her teens was rascally work. No words were strong enough to condemn it.

But there, he had never liked nor trusted Von Kessler. From the first that gentleman had inspired him with a strange sense of antipathy. Now Lord Charles Mountgard knew the reason why he hated and feared him more than anybody in the world. They were both in love with the same girl, and by some queer perversion of taste the girl seemed to prefer her German to her English admirer.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### PAPA GIVES HIS CONSENT.

THE next morning, at breakfast, Mr. Davidson received a letter which apparently put him in high good-humour. He read the contents and chuckled; then re-read them and chuckled again, until his wife's curiosity was fairly aroused. The faintest approach to a secret sufficed to excite it.

"What's the matter, John?" she inquired. "You seem to have had some good news, judging from your appearance."

"Nothing, nothing," he replied diplomatically, seeking to prevent his countenance from betraying a too lively satisfaction. "What should be the matter?"

"It's no use trying to put me off in that sort of way," she re-

torted scornfully. "Just as if I had no eyes in my head! You went to bed last night in a vile temper. This morning you are amiability itself. Something has happened to account for the change. I'm certain of that."

"Well, well, my dear Emma, perhaps you're right, and perhaps you're not. Anyhow, you must have patience and wait until this evening. Then, if all goes off nicely, you shall hear whatever there is to hear."

"Goodness gracious me, John! You are enough to drive one mad with your 'ifs' and your 'perhapses.' Why can't you speak out plainly? It's no use trying to keep a secret from me. Sooner or later I'm bound to find it out."

"I know that," he returned. "You're a regular gimlet."

Mrs. Davidson smiled in acknowledgment of the compliment, but despite her best endeavours, she could not induce her lord and master to say any more. He continued to maintain an irritating reserve.

The letter in question, as probably the reader has already guessed, came from Lord Charles Mountgard, and was so worded as to leave little doubt regarding the writer's intentions in seeking an interview. Short as was the note, it filled Mr. Davidson with elation. Only by the greatest self-control could he refrain from imparting the good news to his wife. But he desired to make her see how ridiculous it was her attempting to set up her judgment against his. This proposal resulted from the garden-party. That was as clear as the nose on one's face. Yet Mrs. Davidson had blamed him for allowing Hetty to accept Lord O'Banashee's invitation, and had even gone so far as to say that if her presentiments came true, it would be all his fault. Pshaw! What rubbish!

Here, in his hand, he held a complete refutation of such absurd predictions. Being, however, a cautious man, and enjoying moreover the feeling of triumph attendant on his wisdom and Mrs. Davidson's shortsightedness, he resolved to tell her nothing until after the interview with Lord Charles was over. She would only fuss and fidget, and advise him to say this and that; whereas he wanted to say things in his own way and not in hers. The more he thought the matter over the more confirmed did he become in the opinion that it would be well for him to receive Lord Charles alone

Therefore, when Hetty mumbled something about having promised to lunch with Amelia Dawkins, in order to minutely discuss the garden party, he said at once, "Quite right, my dear quite right. Go by all means. Your mother, by-the-way, is thinking of paying some calls this afternoon, and can fetch you on her return home."

"John!" interposed Mrs. Davidson severely. "I can't think what's coming to you in your old age. You do invent such extraordinary things. Pray when did I say I intended paying calls this afternoon."

"Didn't you, Emma?" he rejoined, with a slight flush. "I'm sure I thought you did."

"I never *said* I should do so," she continued meditatively, "but still it might be polite to leave cards on Lady Penywern, after Hetty going to the races the other day. Lady Penywern is a very nice person. I like her extremely, and I'll be bound it was no fault of hers that I wasn't invited to join the party. But the poor thing has one disadvantage. She is too meek, and lets herself be sat upon, which is a fatal mistake."

"Go and give her a lesson in independence, Emma. No one is better qualified."

"Well! I think I will. I really think I will. It's quite sad to see a woman so crushed and down-trodden."

"She seems very hearty and jolly upon it," remarked Mr. Davidson incautiously.

Mrs. Davidson pursed up her lips till they were almost lost in one severe, straight line.

"Neglect and ill-treatment are hard things to bear, John. Dear Lady Penywern conceals her cross well, but she has to shoulder it all the same; and you mark my words, that old *roué* of a husband of hers gives a deal of trouble."

"I have been taught to believe that that is a peculiarity belonging to husbands in general," observed Mr. Davidson drily.

"You're about right there," answered the wife of his bosom with a sigh. "If I had only known what men were like when I was a girl, nothing, *nothing* would ever have induced me to marry."

"And yet as a mature widow, unable to plead ignorance as an excuse, you put your head into the noose for the second time."

She coloured with vexation. He had a way of answering back which was exceedingly irritating.

"We need not discuss that matter just now," she said loftily. "People may be unfortunate, and people may be driven to commit acts by the sheer force of circumstances. John," changing the subject with female dexterity, "if Hetty and I both go out, what do you propose to do?"

"First and foremost, my dear, I shall endeavour to console myself to the best of my ability. Secondly"—and a bland smile stole over his face—"I expect a gentleman on business at two o'clock, and shall be glad of the undivided use of the sitting-room."

"Oh! a gentleman on business!" she exclaimed, with a disdainful toss of the head. "Fancy those horrible manufacturing people pursuing you here, with their bothering old looms and cottons. I'm glad you've told me, for I shall make a point of keeping out of the way. Hetty and I get quite enough of that kind of thing at home. Shop, shop, shop, from morning till night! One hears nothing else talked of. I hate trade. It's so vulgar." And she flounced out of the room.

Mr. Davidson smiled again, more blandly than before, and congratulated himself on the adroit manner in which he had managed to ensure his wife's absence. She would be rather astonished on returning to the hotel to learn who "the visitor" was, and for what purpose he had called. For once it did not annoy him to hear his dearly loved trade abused. With such a secret in his possession as the one he now held, he could afford to laugh at the woman's ignorance and pretension. Trade vulgar indeed! Why, here was a scion of the noble house of Skyedale coming to him—a plain Manchester manufacturer—to beg the hand of his daughter. Ha! ha! After that, Mrs. Davidson need not talk or profess to be ashamed of his factories and wares. He rubbed his hands together gleefully as in imagination he pictured her astonishment and confusion. The tongue which had so often twitted him with want of breeding must surely be silenced henceforth. "Father-in-law to a duke's son! Father-in-law to a duke's son!" he murmured to himself, laughing softly meanwhile. Well! he had worked hard, and made his own fortune, and although, personally, he professed to disdain the world's titles, he was not as indifferent to them as he pretended. There was a good deal of satisfaction to be obtained from "my daughter, Lady Charles."



For a long time after his wife had departed the old man sat there, smiling and nodding, his rugged face wearing an unusual expression of amiability.

As two o'clock approached, he grew positively nervous. He went into his dressing-room, washed his hands, smoothed his hair, and arrayed himself in a black suit, usually donned only on the Sabbath. "It's not on my own account," he soliloquized apologetically, as if ashamed of these extensive preparations. "It's on Hetty's. If the young fellow began by being ashamed of me, or taking a dislike to my personal appearance, he might cut up rough, although, to do him justice, I don't believe he's that sort. People always say that a real tip-top swell is quite easy to get along with."

Whereupon he sat down at a writing-table in the sitting-room, and for about the hundredth time began making rough calculations as to what was the highest sum he could afford to settle upon Hetty during his life-time. He was getting an old man now, and would not have many more years to live. To ensure for his only daughter so brilliant a match, he was prepared to make very considerable sacrifices. How well the announcement would look in the Manchester papers: "We are authorized to state that a marriage has been arranged between Hetty, sole heiress of John Davidson, Esquire, of Murchiston Hall, and Lord Charles Mountgard, youngest son of the Duke of Skyedale." How astonished all his old friends would be. Yes, if any difficulties presented themselves, he was determined that a long purse should smooth them away. He would behave not only generously, but munificently. A tap came at the door, and a sallow-faced waiter popped in his head, and announced Lord Charles Mountgard.

With a flush of excitement on his cheek, Mr. Davidson immediately advanced to greet the expected visitor.

"How do you do?" he said cordially but disjointedly, for his heart was beating decidedly faster than its wont. "Very glad to see you. Hope you'll excuse having to mount so high, but the rooms below are engaged for another week. Fine weather—wonderful weather, I may say. Long time since we've had such a summer. Heat really almost too great. Take a seat, pray."

"Thank you," said Lord Charles, who appeared also suffering from considerable agitation. "You are very kind."

So saying, he sat down, and during the long pause which ensued

gazed steadily into the crown of his straw hat, and sucked stealthily at the knob of a gold-headed cane he carried in his right hand. Once or twice he made ineffectual attempts to clear his throat. Then, all of a sudden, his boyish face grew very red, and he burst out impetuously:

"I daresay you can guess why I am here—why I wrote to you begging for an interview?"

Mr. Davidson bowed his head urbanely, and tapped his fingers on the table with encouraging good-humour.

"Well! Lord Charles, perhaps I can. Nevertheless it will be better for me to hear the reason from your own lips."

"The fact is," went on the young man, getting to the point with characteristic bluntness, "I love your daughter."

"I guessed as much," said Mr. Davidson, his countenance beaming. "Go on; you've nothing to fear."

"She is as good as she is beautiful," continued Lord Charles. "I have loved her ever since the first day I set eyes on her sweet face; but, taking her extreme youth into consideration, I did not feel myself justified in proposing until I had gained your and Mrs. Davidson's consent."

"You have acted most honourably, my lord. I only wish all young men were as honest and straightforward in their dealings. As Hetty's father, allow me to express my thanks, and to say how highly I appreciate the delicacy of your conduct. In the present instance, I feel persuaded that the course of true love will run smooth."

"You—you don't think she cares for anybody else, do you?" asked Lord Charles, a little anxiously.

"I'm certain she doesn't. Why, she's only a child just home from school. One or two of those soldier fellows quartered at Manchester showed signs of making up to her, but I soon nipped their attentions in the bud. Hetty's a pretty girl, and a taking girl, but for all that they were only after her for her money."

"Mr. Davidson," said Lord Charles earnestly, "I hope you will do me the justice to believe, that in asking you for your daughter's hand I am actuated by no such motive."

"I know, I know," said the elder man, looking straight into his visitor's plain but honest face. "No need to tell me that you love my little one for her own sake. Your actions have proved it already."

"If she hadn't a farthing in the world, it would make no difference to me," rejoined Lord Charles, with a tremor in his voice. "It is Hetty I want, not her money. I have plenty of my own—plenty both for her and for me."

"Hetty shall not go to you empty-handed, my lord. Of that you may rest assured." And as he spoke the words there was a quiet dignity about Mr. Davidson which became him well.

"We can settle all such details later on," said Lord Charles. "At present I only ask permission to pay my addresses to your daughter."

"You have it already. That one in your position should seek for an alliance with a member of my family is an honour of which I shall everlastingly feel proud."

"Please do not say such a thing, Mr. Davidson. Hetty—I may call her so, may I not?—is fitted to adorn any sphere. As for my father—I must consult him, of course, but I do not for a minute anticipate that he will offer any objection to the match. And now, where is she? Can I see her, and speak to her at once?"

Mr. Davidson laughed out loud. His lordship's impetuosity was most agreeable to his paternal feelings.

"I am afraid you must wait a little," he said, with an indulgent smile. "Hetty has gone to lunch with Miss Dawkins, and I do not expect her home just yet. You had better come and dine with us this evening on the Terrace, and then you and she can arrange matters afterwards to your joint satisfaction."

"Thanks awfully," said Lord Charles, rising to take his leave. "I shall be only too delighted. You—you think I have a chance, then?" he added hesitatingly, as if still not wholly convinced.

"I am sure of it. Why, good heavens, to speak plainly, the girl would be mad to refuse you."

Lord Charles shook his head. This assurance jarred on his sensibilities.

"I do not like to hear you say that. It is looking upon the thing merely from a worldly point of view. Hetty is neither greedy nor calculating. She does not resemble the London young ladies whom I have been in the habit of meeting night after night. This is why I love her so dearly, and yet am a little bit afraid of what her answer may be."

"You are a true lover," rejoined Mr. Davidson jocularly, "full

of doubts and uncertainties. Well, well, cheer up. You won't have to wait long. Tell Hetty all about it this evening, and I'll be bound she won't treat you very severely."

"I wish I could think so," sighed Lord Charles. "Do you know, Mr. Davidson, you'll call me an awful fool, but I've never been in such a funk in my life." And he wiped his brow with a silken handkerchief.

"Tut, tut! As I said before, you've nothing to fear, especially if you are gentle with her just at first. A girl of eighteen knows little or nothing about a man's passion, and it is apt to startle her and make her turn coy until she gets accustomed to it. But don't be alarmed on that account."

"I will do my best not to frighten her," said Lord Charles a little sadly, for, according to his impetuous notions of wooing, such precautions seemed terribly out of place. "If she cared for me, however, surely she would not mind my showing how fond I was of her."

"She might, and she mightn't. There's never any telling. Women are such confoundedly—I beg your pardon—I mean such strangely enigmatical creatures. Anyhow, it's best to be on the safe side."

"Good-bye, Mr. Davidson," said his lordship somewhat ruefully. "I daresay you think me a regular idiot, but one can't help feeling anxious when one is in love."

"Good-bye, Lord Charles, until this evening. Keep up your spirits, for, believe me, all will be well. It must. Hetty is but a mere child. She has no will of her own as yet, and even if she may require to be *taught* how to love, she is pretty enough not to render the task very unpleasant."

Whereupon the two men shook hands heartily, and Lord Charles posted off in hot haste to Mrs. Northcote's lodgings, in order, if possible, to catch an earlier glimpse of his lady-love. But she was not there—had not been there all day—and yet Mr. Davidson had distinctly stated that she was luncheon with Miss Dawkins. What could it mean? A dim presentiment of evil stole over his mind. Do what he would, he could not shake it off. The love-sick youth had worked himself up into such a state of anxiety and excitement, that for the time being his nerves were perfectly unstrung. Instinct warned him, perhaps, that Hetty did not return his passion.

"Are you sure she has not been here?" he inquired so pointedly of Amelia as to arouse that young lady's suspicions.

"Yes, quite. Nothing was ever said about her lunching with us to-day, for the very good reason that we ourselves were engaged to lunch with the Van de Bleydens, and have only been back a few minutes."

"H'm! It's extremely odd. I can't make it out at all. There's a screw loose somewhere."

"I say, Charlie," said Amelia, in her frank, blunt way—"what's the matter with you to-day? Has anything happened?"

He blushed up to his ears.

"There's no—nothing the matter," he stammered in reply.

"You haven't any good news to tell me?"

"No, not yet. Perhaps I may have by to-morrow. I can't say, though. It all depends."

She understood now, and looked up into his face with a smile.

"Charlie," she said, "you and I are old friends, who need not beat about the bush. I wish you good luck, both for your own sake and for hers. She is very young and has much to learn, but her heart is in the right place, and I think she will make you happy when once she has grown to know you and to trust you."

As she finished speaking, the tears stood in Amelia's eyes. Of late it had struck her that North Penywern seemed inclined to pay Hetty a great deal of attention, and she liked him so much that she had not been able to refrain from feeling a little sore and jealous when he apparently deserted her for her friend.

If Lord Charles proposed to Hetty, and she accepted him, which she was certain to do, the event would materially improve her own prospects.

It was selfish reasoning, but who can help being selfish when they are in love? If carefully analysed, egotism plays a prominent part in every *grande passion*.

Lord Charles pressed Amelia's hand. Her evident solicitude touched and affected him.

"Thank you," he said simply. "You are very kind to me, and you shall be the first to hear of it, if it comes off." And then he went away and wandered miserably about the tennis ground and the promenade, vainly hoping to catch a glimpse of Hetty, until it was time to dress for dinner. In the interval he had become

quite pale and shaky, and his hand trembled visibly as he changed the dark blue tie he had been wearing all day for one of a lighter hue. Never had his toilet been conducted under such difficulties, for never had his clothes seemed to fit him worse or make him appear to less advantage.

"I'm such an ugly devil," the poor young fellow muttered despondently. "I believe it's that that puts her off me. Girls think such a lot of good looks in a man, and I—well, I am just about as plain as they make them."

He gazed at his reflection in the glass, but this did not improve matters in the least, for with a sorrowful gesture he turned away, and exclaimed passionately, "Oh! Hetty, oh! my darling, take me, only take me, and I'll try my very hardest to make you happy, and teach you to forget that I'm not six feet high, broad in proportion, and don't wear a dark cloth uniform with gilt buttons."

*(To be continued.)*

## In the Dusk.

By W. W. FENN.

THAT semi-obscurity which in the country is regarded as twilight becomes dusk in London, or should do so according to that unwritten law which regulates the fitness of things subjective. The pathos and the poetry of the period as we know it in the midst of pastoral or wild natural scenery are scarcely even suggested when we are surrounded by interminable brick and mortar. Or rather, what there is of pathos and poetry in the vista of a metropolitan thoroughfare just as the street lamps are being lighted is of so entirely different a character, and appeals to such an entirely different set of emotions, that we are not inclined somehow to describe the hour by the same word in both places. Away under the dim but pure glow of Heaven our feelings and thoughts, it is to be hoped, usually respond harmoniously to all that meets the eye, and by the same token our ideas drift into a wholly altered channel when we gaze upwards and find the skyline jagged and broken by roofs and chimney-pots. Everything combines to keep the two frames of mind apart for a considerable distance, and if they become merged in one sensation ultimately there is an enormous distinction in their genesis. The beauty and tender charm of the fading landscape as it "glimmers on the sight," however, appeal to comparatively few as numbered against the masses of humanity congregated in a great centre. These latter vastly prefer dusk to twilight, for to them dusk in town means not only a return from the labours of the desk and counting-house, the workshop and the factory, to the rest and sociability of home, but it offers them a host of resources in the absence of which they find the twilight hour in the country essentially dull. Nine out of ten of such ordinary everyday mortals would consider dusk as quite the cheerfulest hour out of the twenty-four to be spent in the streets except perhaps in the height of summer. Nor is this preference confined to commonplace people; if it were we should not see London the selected



residence of so many of the highest intellects. Pages might be filled with the names of eminent men and women who find in London alone that inspiration which enables them to turn out their work, whatever it is, with the greatest success. Exceptions of course there are in which the quiet and other characteristics of rural life are essential to the production of certain intellectual and other "wares," at any rate during a large proportion of the year; but in the main it is where the throb of man's energy is most keenly felt that he finds the stimulus to his progress as a civilized and civilizing being.

Hence we can quite account for the attraction which dusk has for the Londoner. It seems to afford him an exact equivalent for the same peculiar sort of restful and poetic solace which the passage from day into night may be supposed to bring exclusively to residents in the country. The gloom and murk of the great city fascinate him, it would appear, in a way which daylight fails to do, and conjure up a sentiment indigenous to the streets. This odd contradictory feeling, begotten perhaps from the modified quality of even the brightest winter sunlight, has been well described by a kindly American critic, Mr. Henry James, when he says:—

"We do not like London well enough till we like its defects—the dense darkness of much of its winter, the soot in the chimneys and everywhere else, the early lamplight, the brown blur of the houses, the splashing of hansoms in Oxford Street or the Strand on December afternoons. There is still something to me that recalls the enchantments of children—the anticipation of Christmas, the delight of a holiday walk—in the way the shop-fronts shine into the fog. It makes each of them seem a little world of light and warmth, and I can still waste time in looking at them, with dirty Bloomsbury on one side and dirtier Soho on the other. There are winter effects, not intrinsically sweet, it would appear, which somehow touch the chords of memory, and even the fount of tears, in absence, as, for instance, the front of the British Museum on a black afternoon, or the portico, when the weather is vile, of one of the big square clubs in Pall Mall. I can give no adequate account of the subtle poetry of such reminiscences; it depends upon associations of which we have often lost the thread. The wide colonnade of the Museum, its symmetrical wings, the high iron fence in its granite setting, the

sense of the misty halls wherein all its treasures lie—these things loom through a thickness of atmosphere which doesn't make them dreary, but, on the contrary, imparts to them something of the cheer of red lights in a storm. I think the romance of a winter afternoon in London arises partly from the fact that when it is not altogether smothered the general lamplight takes this hue of hospitality. Such is the colour of the interior glow of the clubs in Pall Mall, which I positively like best when the fog loiters upon their monumental staircases."

The writer's reference to the possibility of the lamplight being "altogether smothered" points to a familiar condition of things in winter which cannot be overlooked in any meditations on this subject. For truly, apart from the hospitality aspect, none but a Mark Tapley-like disposition can discover much charm in our dense fogs. A "London particular" has its humorous side, no doubt, but it fails in fascination. When the lamplight is "altogether smothered" it is something beyond a joke to describe it as dusk or even as "between the lights," for you cannot tell when you are between them or their posts unless you happen to run against one. It is certainly impossible to say, except by the clock, whether it is morning, noon, or night. We can only surmise, in the words of Rosse:—

"By the clock 'tis day,  
And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp:  
Is't night's predominance or the day's shame  
That darkness does the face of earth entomb  
When living light should kiss it?"

Our sole consolation is the glorious uncertainty of the fog's duration; probably it will vanish as suddenly as the "black and midnight hags" did from the presence of Macbeth, for it is their especial atmosphere. Like other climatic effects, it all depends on a change of wind, and no one knows when that will come about. Meanwhile it is utterly detestable, of course, a "foul and filthy air," and London when suffering under it may be likened to Virgil's description of the Cyclops: "*Monstrum horrendum informe ingens cui lumen ademptum*," "a horrible monster, huge, without form, and with his lights put out."

At such times we may sigh for the tropics, although, for the most part, the Briton, whether in town or country, begrudges his dusk or twilight, and stoutly objects to step suddenly from light

into dark, as he does in the region of the equator. Nor, on the other hand, does he care for the opposite extreme, that prolonged and even drawn battle between day and night which, for a part of the year, goes on within the arctic circle. He has had enough of the sun by midnight, and does not appreciate the presence of that luminary at such an unreasonable hour except as a curiosity. Certainly it might help him over the difficulty experienced by the Irishman who, in deprecation of the sun, questioned its utility, seeing that it only shines by day, and when consequently there is no need for such illumination. He gave his preference to the moon for the reason that Diana appears by night, when of course her light is invaluable. The average individual, however, does not take this Hibernian-bull-like view of the case. The worst that can befall him in England in respect of such a dusky confusion of ideas will only be similar to that uncertainty produced by a very full moon, which, rising red and huge at the end of a long London street, provoked a discussion between two drowsy friends as to whether it was moon or sun, or that of the third friend, who, when appealed to to decide, evaded the responsibility with the declaration that "he could not say, as he was a stranger in those parts."

And so, on the whole the Briton is fain to content himself with the eccentricities and inconveniences of his climate, London fogs notwithstanding. He is better off, he may depend, within his temperate zone than in any other on this ball of earth, grumble though of course he will with his last breath. It is a privilege of his birthright, and one not likely to be relinquished, not until for each and all of us "the long day closes," and the dusk or twilight of our lives utterly fades, and "the night cometh when no man can work."

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## "That Other."

By MRS. HUNGERFORD,  
Author of "MOLLY BAWN," etc.

### I.

How she goes to the heart, the head,  
With delicate arms outspread  
And fair sweet body poised for a spring ;  
I catch her, I hold her, an hour,  
But to *keep* her—is that in man's power,  
The soulless exquisite thing ?

### II.

As a feather is light, being blown  
'Twixt earth and a sky blue-grown  
(Sky only—what's Heaven to a trifle like her ?),  
So she sways, and delights in the blowing ;  
Where's the grip in it ? Where is the growing  
Towards greatness or godliness, where ?

### III.

Yet the tangled-bright gold of her hair—  
In it is there heaven nowhere,  
No tremulous growth towards the greatness beyond ?  
Is the blue of her eyes all a snare ?  
Is the red of her lips all I dare  
To believe in ? False, false, is her bond !

### IV.

Yet I hold her—I cling to her ;  
Oh ! were she true, as she's lovelier  
Far than the godly cold women I know,  
What rapture to die for her ! Pouf !  
Could a butterfly live 'neath a roof ?  
Let her go !  
She is fire—not snow !

## A Romance of Modern London.

By CURTIS YORKE,

Author of "HUSH!" "THE MYSTERY OF BELGRAVE SQUARE," "THE BROWN PORTMANTEAU," "DUDLEY," "THE WILD RUTHVENS," "THAT LITTLE GIRL," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER V.

#### A PRECOCIOUS YOUNG WOMAN.

"Let not the children weep; the dew is so heavy on the young flowers."

JEAN PAUL RICHTER.

"God sets some souls in shade, alone;  
They have no daylight of their own;  
Only in lives of happier ones  
They see the shine of distant suns.  
God knows. Content thee with thy night,  
Thy greater Heaven hath grander light.  
To-day is close. The hours are small.  
Thou sit'st afar, and hast them all."

.....

MRS. CHANDLER was seated in her gorgeously-furnished drawing-room in Portland Place. I use the word "gorgeous" advisedly. The room was not pretty, nor homelike, nor tasteful, nor artistic—it was simply gorgeous. The trail of the upholsterer lay over it all. Mrs. Chandler herself—dressed in grass-green velvet, picked out with black—had something of the same air of uneasy grandeur—a grandeur to which she plainly was not born. She had a perpetual air of sitting for her portrait—poor woman. For when she succeeded in assuming the attitude and smile which she believed were the attitude and smile of a woman "in society" she felt afraid to move, lest the effect should be spoiled. Not that she cared to shine in society, but Mr. Chandler desired that she should, and now, as in the old Peckham days, Mr. Chandler's word was law. Mrs. Chandler, however, in spite of all her efforts, never looked in the least like a lady of fashion. But she had a nice, honest, wholesome face with little brown eyes

that disappeared altogether when she laughed, and a quantity of thick grey hair. She had a tall, well-proportioned figure too—at least it had once been well-proportioned. But now the boundary lines of waist and neck had vanished, and were as though they had never been. It was irresistibly conveyed to the casual observer that if her face had been the least bit larger, her skin would not have covered it. As it was the skin was so painfully stretched and glazy as to make on-lookers tremble when she smiled.

A lady was seated opposite her, a lady also tall, but thin to leanness. Her eyes and hair were of an indefinite ash colour, and her features were of a singular delicacy and refinement. Her dress, though plain, was in exquisite taste; her every movement full of grace.

"My dear Mrs. Chandler," she was saying in a languid, mellow voice, "it is really very interesting. I did not know until quite lately that you and Mr. Chandler had any family. How sad that your only child should have married so unfortunately. And how strange your meeting the little girl in that chance way. Really, it is quite a romantic story. Nearly eight years old, you say? She will be a charming companion for my little Fay. Can I not see her?"

"Well, really, Lady Dinwoodie, I'm almost ashamed to have her brought down. She's the most determined little fury. And sullen, to that extent you would not believe it. It's my belief she would rather be back in that low street, with that upsetting young lad, than here with all the luxuries of—of wealth," concluded the old lady somewhat vaguely.

"Ah, poor child, it is all strange to her," answered Lady Dinwoodie with a softened look in her eyes as she glanced at her own little daughter, who was seated demurely upon a low chair near her.

"And cries in her bed at nights for 'Douglas—Douglas,'" went on the old lady in an aggrieved tone, "until it's heart-breaking to hear her."

"This Douglas was her adopted brother, I think you said?" asked the other lady.

"Yes. And I will say he seemed fond enough of the child. A nice lad enough, I should say, though 'aughty for his station in my opinion. And I'm sure all the clothes he had on couldn't have cost more than a few shillings."

"Ah," said the other drily, and with a faint inflection of contempt in her even tones.

Lady Dinwoodie despised the Chandlers. But then, what of that? We are not bound to reverence all our acquaintances. It is not altogether unprecedented for an impecunious lady of title to be hand and glove with the underbred wife of an equally underbred millionaire. I suppose Lady Dinwoodie had her reasons for cultivating the Chandlers. There are reasons for most friendships in modern London, and they are not necessarily either noble or disinterested reasons. And Lady Dinwoodie usually had very good and sufficient reasons for all she did—or said, for that matter. She was not really a much more elevated character than this big vulgar woman whom she despised. And she was not nearly so warm-hearted, which of course was very sensible of her; for warm-heartedness is quite a second-rate sort of quality, as we all know. Her little daughter Fay possessed, perhaps, the one soft spot in her ladyship's heart—and even Fay only touched that spot occasionally. I fancy Fay Dinwoodie must have resembled her father (who had died shortly after her birth). She certainly did not resemble her mother, being small and pert-looking, and not strikingly refined either in manners or appearance. She had fair hair, and dark eyes and eyebrows, which piquant combination gave her an elfish look, not altogether unattractive.

"I want to see the little girl," she announced abruptly, and with a certain aggrieved air.

She hated paying afternoon calls, and she thought afternoon calls in the Chandlers' ugly drawing-room a special penance.

"I want to see the little girl," she repeated more loudly, as no notice was taken of her.

"And so you shall, my dear," said Mrs. Chandler, with her fat good-natured smile; "and I'm sure I hope you will be friendly, living so near and that."

She rang the bell as she spoke, and told the man who appeared in answer to tell Miss Adeane's nurse to send her downstairs. After some little delay, "Miss Adeane" was forcibly led into the room, a forlorn-looking little figure enough, in spite of her smart frock and shoes with silver buckles.

"Come, Katharine, my dear," said her grandmother in a wheedling voice—(Mrs. Chandler much admired the name of Katharine,



and she pronounced it with a marked emphasis upon the last syllable)—“come away and speak to this lady and to this pretty little miss.”

Bee simply glared—there was no other word for it—but she did not speak.

“Come, come, now,” went on the old lady, with a growing touch of asperity in her tone, “come and say ‘How do you do’ prettily. Oh, fie! to scowl like that.”

“I don’t want to speak to anybody,” was the uncompromising reply in a choked voice. “I want to go home.”

“Oh dear, dear,” said Lady Dinwoodie in her soft languid voice, “this is really very sad.”

Little Fay had risen, and was regarding the new comer curiously.

“What are you crying for?” she said gravely.

“I’m not crying,” flashed out the other.

“Yes, you are,” persisted Fay. “Your eyes are red, and tears are coming out of them, so you must be crying. What a baby you must be.”

“Take little Miss Dinwoodie to the nursery and show her your doll, Katharine, my dear,” said Mrs. Chandler. “You’ll soon be great friends, I can see.”

But “Katharine” stood still, silent and miserable, upon which Fay, in obedience to a look from her mother, promptly took the other little one by the hand and led her away.

Bee made no resistance, and presently both children stood in the airy, comfortable day-nursery which had been prepared for the small waif of Garth Street. An elderly woman sat sewing in an inner room. This was Collins—Bee’s nurse and chosen foe.

“You don’t really play with dolls, I hope?” asked Fay, fixing her bright dark eyes upon her companion after an exhaustive survey of the apartment.

For answer Bee pointed to a heap of silk and lace, surmounted by a golden crop of “real” hair, which lay upon the floor in a corner. It was a lovely waxen baby, or rather it had been. Now, alas! its face was ruthlessly beaten in, its eyes had disappeared, leaving in their place two dreadful hollows.

“I *hate* it!” said the murdered baby’s mamma passionately. “I broke it, and I’m glad. I want to go home. I want to be with Douglas again.

"Well, I'm glad you don't play with dolls, you know," observed Fay, with her most grown-up air. "I shouldn't have thought much of you if you had. I should think you're the same age as me, and I wouldn't be seen playing with dolls, I can tell you. Only babies play with dolls. And I'm nine years old. Let's talk about things," she added abruptly. "Do you go to many parties?"

"Parties! What's that?" asked the unrepentant doll-breaker, somewhat sullenly.

Fay regarded her with open scorn.

"You don't know what *parties* are!" she exclaimed with wide, amazed eyes. "Why—where *have* you lived, my dear?" (This with an exact reproduction of her mother's voice and manner.) "Why, parties are *lovely*," she went on patronizingly. "You have on a pretty frock, you know—some girls have a new one each time, but mother can't afford that. And you dance and wave a fan about and look silly, and pretend to be tired, like grown-up ladies do. And then some boy takes you down to supper, and you eat as much as ever you can and pull crackers. Then you dance again, and then you come away. And when you drive home it is quite dark and late, and all the lamps are lighted."

Both children were seated upon the broad low window-seat by this time. Bee had been listening with but a faint appearance of interest.

"It doesn't sound very nice," she said indifferently. "I'd rather go for a walk with Douglas, or else roast apples with him." And the grey eyes filled with tears.

"Who *is* Douglas?" inquired Miss Fay in a dubious tone.

"He is my brother, and I do love him so. And he will be so lonely without me, and will have no little housekeeper."

"Why doesn't he live here, then, if he is your brother?" asked Fay, knitting her strongly-marked brows.

"Because he says he isn't my brother now, and they," with a rebellious jerk backwards of her head, "say he isn't either, and that they are my grandpapa and grandmamma."

"Well, so they are," observed practical Fay. "I heard mother say so. Is Douglas a nice boy?" she went on. "Is he at *Eton*?—or has he a tutor? My cousin Cyril—he is Sir Cyril Northburgh you know, because Uncle Philip is dead—has left *Eton*, and been

travelling all over strange countries with his tutor. He and Aunt Emily live in our square. Very likely I shall marry him when I grow up. I heard mother and Aunt Emily talking about it yesterday. Has your Douglas a tutor?"

"I don't know," Bee answered, wondering vaguely what a "tutor" might be.

Fay sat silent for a few minutes, then she said suddenly:

"Look here, Katharine——"

"My name isn't Katharine," flashed out the other. "It's Bee."

"Bee? What a queer name. Haven't you any other? *My* name's Fay, but my real name is Felicia. But I was going to say, wouldn't it be fun if you and me were to go to see your Douglas some day. He would get a surprise, wouldn't he?" She lowered her voice as she spoke and glanced towards the inner room. "Of course we needn't tell anybody, you know," she said, "or they would be sure to stop us."

Little Bee had sprung to her feet with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks.

"Oh, yes, yes—we will go," she cried excitedly.

"Hush!—you little silly," broke in Fay—who, indeed, was quite a little woman of the world compared to unsophisticated Bee—"don't you say a word about it. Where does Douglas live?"

"In Garth Street," sighed Bee.

"Garth Street? Where's that? Is it in Belgravia, or Mayfair, or Kensington, or where?"

"Don't know," dejectedly.

"Oh well, we'll find it. You just do all your grandmother tells you, and don't behave like a baby. And then, don't you see, she'll let you do pretty much as you like."

"But I don't love her, and I don't want to do what she tells me," muttered Bee, to whom love and obedience were one.

"Love her?" repeated Fay—"no, of course you don't love her. But you'll find it better to do what she tells you." This with a wise little nod of her flaxen head. "Why, I don't love Aunt Emily—but I have to do what she tells me."

Bee was silent, and Fay continued:

"On fine days Ann and I always walk in the Park or in Kensington Gardens. Ann is my maid, you know. At least she is my nurse, but I always call her my maid. If you like you can come too. We could walk round this way and call for you."

"Could we go to see Douglas?" asked the other wistfully.

"Not with Ann," was the decided answer. "But don't you be afraid. I'll take you—whenever we get a chance. It will be just the greatest piece of fun. But," impressively, "be *sure* you don't speak of it."

Anything in the shape of an adventure was dear to the heart of this precocious young lady of nine years old. It was not so very long ago since she had driven her mother almost frantic by disappearing for a whole morning in search of Buckingham Palace, being fired with the ambitious desire of interviewing her sovereign personally and privately. Upon that occasion she had lost her way, and been ignominiously brought home by a policeman. There was a curious difference between her precocity and Bee's old-fashionedness. The latter was so essentially childlike; the other so weirdly unchildlike, and shrewd, and full of worldly wisdom. But they became great friends, and their friendship was never broken in all the years that came after.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bee gradually became reconciled to her new life. True, she still wept nightly as she lay in her little bed in the dark; and she still compared the grandeur of Portland Place most unfavourably with Garth Street. But she was docile and obedient, and very seldom indulged in any of her former fits of sullenness or passion. Her grandfather she rarely saw, nor could she ever be induced to speak to him. Her grandmother she tolerated passively; answering when she spoke to her, and behaving "prettily" when the old lady took her to drive in the Park, or to pay afternoon calls.

One day Bee was thrown into the seventh heaven of delight by receiving a letter from Douglas. It was a very nice letter, and was printed, not written, so that its recipient could read it quite easily. It was addressed, "Miss Katharine Adeane," but it began, "My dearest Bee." The child wore it inside her frock, and read it until it was almost worn away with being unfolded so often. She showed it with great pride to Fay, and that young person perused it with interest, and carefully spelled out the address—"13, Garth Street, Westminster."

"Hurrah!" she exclaimed softly, clapping her tiny hands—they were in the nursery at Portland Place, ready to go for a walk

with Ann—"Hurrah! We'll go to-day, Bee, if we get the chance. We will—we will."

The colour came quickly to Bee's face; her eyes sparkled. "Oh, Fay—I *love* you!" she exclaimed impetuously, flinging her arms round the other's neck.

But Fay disengaged herself quickly. She did not care for demonstrations of affection—considered them babyish, in fact. And yet in her way the little minx was fond of Bee—though she wouldn't for worlds have told her so.

Nothing could have been more demure than Miss Fay's general demeanour as she trotted by Ann's side along the wind-swept pavements on this particular September afternoon. But every now and then she pinched Bee's arm, and allowed a little smile to dimple over her face in a way indicative of suppressed glee. As for Bee, she was quite happy. She was going to see Douglas—perhaps to stay with him always, and be his little housekeeper once more, in which case Fay would of course come to see them every day. Sweet, inconsequent shortsightedness of childhood!—in which all things are possible that are desirable, where geese are all swans, and every ant-hill is a mountain, where a year is a lifetime, and Heaven a sure and certain goal!

The children walked and played about in Kensington Gardens until nearly dusk, then went slowly homeward along the Bayswater Road. Shortly after they had passed the Marbie Arch, Ann entered a draper's shop on some mission of her own. Fay and Bee roamed about in their usual fashion, examining everything within reach and chatting volubly. For a few minutes Ann forgot all about them, being engaged in matching a particular shade of ribbon. In these few minutes Fay grasped Bee's hand and whispered exultantly:

"Now!—*now*—quick!"

In another second they were out of the shop, and skimming like two young swallows down a side street, from which they swung round to the right into Seymour Street, where Fay stopped, panting and breathless, her eyes dancing with excitement and mischief. The next moment, to her companion's speechless awe and delight, she had hailed a passing hansom, and pushing Bee in, scrambled hastily after her, and shut the doors with quite an imposing bang.

"Drive to 13, Garth Street, Westminster," said Fay im-

periously, addressing the driver's eye, which gazed down at them through the little trap-door in the roof.

"All right, miss," said a gruff chuckling voice.

And they drove off just as the distracted Ann came rushing round the corner in search of them. But of course she never thought of looking into the hansom.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was dreary enough in Garth Street after "the little one" was gone. So dreary that Douglas almost dreaded coming home from his long pilgrimages in fruitless search for work. The room seemed so terribly still. The stillness and the silence hurt him somehow. There had been no want of stir and life when Bee had been the presiding spirit of the place. Even now Douglas seemed to hear the ripple of her childish laughter, the sound of her restless feet, the murmuring of her tender little voice in his ear. The dust lay thick on his books; the plants in the window drooped and faded—now that the little housekeeper was gone.

Times had been hard with him after Bee left, so hard that he was thankful she was not there to share them. He economized in every possible way. He gave up his bedroom, and slept in the cupboard-like apartment which had been Bee's, and which went with the little sitting-room. He reduced his food to almost infinitesimal fractions. Nevertheless, he owed Mrs. Dobbs for several weeks' rent, and that worthy woman began to look injured and sullen, and to make audible remarks (addressed to no one in particular) in her young lodger's hearing, anent "poor widows being put upon," etc.

About the beginning of September, however, Douglas, having replied to an advertisement for some one to copy deeds at home at so much per folio, was fortunate enough to be selected from a shoal of other applicants; and as he worked well and swiftly, he gradually succeeded in obtaining quite as much employment of this kind as he could conscientiously overtake. It was wretchedly paid employment, of course; but it kept him from starving, and enabled him to pay his arrears of rent. But it didn't do much more.

One afternoon he was writing busily, as usual—his table drawn close up to the window to catch the last rays of the fast-waning autumn light. One could see that the world had not

been using him over well. His clothes were worn and shabby, and looked more than a size too small for him. For young bones and muscles will stretch out, in spite of poor and insufficient food—and Douglas was growing fast. His face was pale and thin, and heavy shadows lay under his eyes. But the light in the eyes themselves burned steadfastly still; the lines of the mouth were more resolute than ever. Poverty and privation and loneliness had not conquered the struggling, panting, never-resting soul—not a boy's soul now, but a man's.

All at once he laid down his pen and listened. Swift eager feet were climbing the stairs—children's feet, surely? They came nearer—nearer. They were on the landing.

Douglas rose hastily from his chair; but before he could reach the door it was flung open, and a tiny figure—such a smart figure in moss-green velvet, with beaver trimmings!—precipitated itself into his arms.

"Bee! Why, Bee—my dear little girl, where did you come from?" he exclaimed in mingled surprise and delight.

But Bee did not answer. She was rubbing her head against his shabby jacket, just as she used to do, and clinging to him with spasmodic kisses and little shrieks of joy. The smart hat lay unheeded on the floor.

"I've come back! I've come back! I've come to *stay*!" she announced joyfully, when a minute or so had passed, during which Douglas felt a strange lump in his throat, and an unwonted mist over his eyes.

"To stay?" he repeated, smoothing back the bright tangled locks. "No, dear, not to stay, I'm afraid. Who brought you?"

"I brought her," put in a sharp little voice from the door. "And I think, Bee—I really think—that you might have been polite enough to introduce me."

"Oh this is Fay," said Bee, slipping out of Douglas's arms and seizing her little friend by the hand. "She lives quite near to me, and she wanted to see you too."

Douglas shook hands with her; then he said gravely:

"Did you come alone? Does Mrs. Chandler know you have come?"

Both young ladies wriggled uneasily. Finally Bee, who recognized the stern look that was deepening in Douglas's eyes, whimpered apologetically:



"She wouldn't have let us come if she had known."

While Fay looked at him witheringly.

The young fellow's face softened. He shut the door and sat down at the table.

"Come and tell me all about it," he said, drawing both children towards him, and speaking very gently.

In a comparatively short time—considering that Bee and Fay either both talked at once or interrupted and contradicted each other systematically and persistently—he had been "told all about it," and having been told, felt considerably dismayed.

"But do you mean to say that no one has any idea where you are?" he said in rather a shocked voice when the recital was ended.

"No, of course not," returned Fay promptly. "There would have been no fun if people had known. And I must say," she added severely—"I didn't think you lived in a place like *this*. Bee told me it was a lovely room. And—why do you wear clothes like *these*?" placing a disgusted little gloved forefinger upon his shabby sleeve. "I thought you would look like my cousin Cyril. But you don't—not a bit. And yet your face is nice. I shan't mind kissing you when I say good-bye."

"I'm not going to say good-bye," observed Bee stoutly; "I'm going to stay for ever and ever."

She began to pull off her gloves as she spoke, but Douglas stopped her.

"No, Bee, darling," he said, "you must let me take you home. See, it is nearly dark, and Mrs. Chandler will be very much alarmed about you. Is the cab still there?"

But the visitors, who had clearly meditated a protracted stay, had dismissed their Jehu, Fay having graciously presented him with half-a-crown, which had been "burning a hole" in her pocket for the last few days, and had appeared a fitting sacrifice to the occasion.

Many were the tears and wailings before Bee could be persuaded to leave her old home again. The faithful little heart saw no poverty of luxuries, or even necessities. Shabby clothes were nothing to her, as long as they held her Douglas, her hero. Where he was there would she wish to be. At last she sobbingly promised "to be good," and was prevailed upon to put on her hat and gloves, preparatory to going back to Portland Place—she would not call it "home."

Fay, who had been looking disparagingly round the room, rose with alacrity.

"Do you *always* live here?" she inquired, as they went slowly down the dark narrow stair, Douglas carrying Bee, as of old.

"Yes," he answered shortly, for he felt a curious repulsion towards this precocious, elf-like child.

"Do you *like* living here?" she continued, when they were in the lamp-lit street.

"Little girls shouldn't ask so many questions," was the curt answer.

"I think you are a very rude boy," Miss Fay rejoined with dignity. "I'm glad Bee doesn't live with you now."

"You had better give me your hand," he answered coolly, as they came to a crossing, "unless you want to be run over. Come."

"Why don't you take a cab?" she murmured, obeying him, however, by putting her hand in his.

"Because I can't afford it," was the brief reply. "We are going to take an omnibus."

Half-an-hour later the trio mounted the steps of the Chandlers' mansion in Portland Place. Bee was cross and tired and sleepy. Fay—bright and wideawake—was secretly resenting the severe lecture "that boy" had taken upon himself to deliver to her as they walked up from Regent Circus, anent her leading her younger companion into disobedience and insubordination.

But Fay was a naughty little girl at this period of her existence, and was therefore jubilantly unrepentant.

## CHAPTER VI.

### MAMMON.

"One-fourth of life is intelligible, the other three-fourths is unintelligible; and our earliest duty is to cultivate the habit of not looking round the corner."—RUTHERFORD.

"Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image the show  
Of mankind as they live in these fashions I hardly shall know—  
Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses, the courage that gains,  
And the prudence that keeps what men strive for."

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE Chandlers happened to be giving a large dinner-party on the night of the children's escapade. Of course Lady Dinwoodie

was to be present—she was a “standing dish” at the Chandler entertainments—and on this occasion an invitation had also been sent to her nephew, Sir Cyril Northburgh, a youth of some nineteen years and much worldly experience. Indeed he was almost as worldly-wise in his way as his nine-year-old Cousin Fay.

When Ann returned to Bryanstone Square alone, about half-past seven—for she had rushed about distractedly in search of the truants for nearly two hours—Lady Dinwoodie was under the hands of her confidential maid, Darley. But when she heard Ann's news, she sprang to her feet with a sharp cry. And then followed a very bad quarter of an hour for poor Ann, at the end of which Lady Dinwoodie fell into a fit of shuddering weeping (thereby undoing a good deal of careful work on Darley's part), sobbing out that her darling child was lost, or kidnapped, or perhaps dead, and that she herself was a worldly, frivolous woman, and that this was a judgment upon her, etc., etc.

“Go round and ask Sir Cyril to come to me at once,” she concluded hysterically at last to the miserable Ann.

Lady Dinwoodie had got into the way of consulting her nonchalant nephew on various matters. He had a fair amount of common sense, had Cyril. As his mother, Lady Northburgh, had none at all, this was rather a good thing.

This wise youth promptly obeyed his aunt's summons, and was at once ushered up to her dressing-room. Cyril Northburgh was rather good to look at; he was tall, fair, and well-shaped, but the effect of his handsome face and figure was in some degree counteracted by an air of mingled weariness and ineffable condescension, which was apt to arouse feelings of irritation in the casual observer. He lounged into the room and propped himself up against the mantelshelf.

“Er—what's the matter, aunt?” he inquired languidly, after a minute's silent survey of his weeping relative. Having been put in possession of the facts, he observed, fixing his eyeglass more firmly into his left eye, “You say the little Chandler girl was with her? Then why not send along and see if she's there.”

“Ann has been there, and she isn't,” sobbed his aunt somewhat enigmatically.

“Don't cry, aunt. What's the use?” remonstrated the young man. “Look here, I'll undertake to find her for you—sometime between this and to-morrow morning. What a little

imp she is! We can send excuses for the Chandlers' feed. And now that I think of it, I'll go there first and see if they have heard anything. I presume they are as anxious about their granddaughter as you are about Fay."

He sauntered off, and chanced to arrive at the Chandlers' door just a couple of seconds later than Douglas Conrath and his two young charges.

Fay pounced upon him at once.

"Well, Cyril," she said with a rather overdone air of nonchalance. "Has mother been wondering where I was?"

"Well, yes, she has, rather," was the calm answer. "May I ask, my dear young friend, where you *have* been?"

"Oh, bother," said his cousin unceremoniously. "I'll tell you after. Allow me to introduce Douglas, Bee's used-to-be-brother," she added, with dignity. "Douglas, this is my cousin, Cyril."

Both youths bowed slightly. If anything, young Conrath's bow was the haughtier.

"Er—delighted, I'm sure," drawled Cyril superciliously.

At this moment the door flew open, revealing a footman very gorgeous in the matter of powder and legs, who suffered a faint wave of surprise to ripple across his well-trained features at the oddly-assorted group which streamed into the brightly-lighted hall. Just then Mrs. Chandler, resplendent in royal-blue velvet and diamonds, appeared between the heavy crimson curtains which draped the door of the morning-room, where, as a matter of fact, the master and mistress of the house spent most of their time when alone, feeling more at home there than in the larger apartments. On seeing Bee, who stood rubbing her eyes dejectedly, the old lady hurried forward as quickly as her size would permit, exclaiming excitedly:

"Katharine—you naughty, naughty child, wherever have you been? Your grandpa *is* in a way, I can tell you."

Then, observing Sir Cyril, she greeted him with the agitated confusion she always displayed towards any possessor of any title. She persisted in regarding him as the restorer of her granddaughter, and, after one brief handshake, utterly ignored poor Douglas. And the latter, with something like a sneer on his strong young face, bid a curt farewell to Bee—regardless of her piteous wailing—and swung himself out into the darkness.

A slight rain had begun to fall—but Douglas did not notice it.

The old bitter sense of injustice was strong upon him. The old wound of his separation from Bee was, as it were, suddenly torn open. He had felt keenly, as he stood there in the luxuriously-furnished hall, the sharp contrast his shabby garments presented to the faultless evening-dress—partially concealed by an equally faultless overcoat—of the young aristocrat who had glanced over him so superciliously through his glittering eyeglass. He had noted and resented Mrs. Chandler's preoccupied greeting. For he was proud—far too proud for his position and prospects, I daresay; but then, in that he was not singular. After a little while his thoughts softened, as he thought of Bee. Dear little woman! At any rate they were kind to her. She looked plump and rosy and happy, and she had not forgotten him—God bless her! And busy with these conflicting thoughts, he walked rapidly homewards through the swiftly-falling rain.

Meanwhile Fay had flatly refused to go home, announcing her intention, indeed, of remaining all night at Portland Place, and sleeping with Bee. Nor could any commands nor persuasions from her cousin move her determination. In the end it was arranged so, Cyril shrugging his shoulders resignedly over the inevitable. His small cousin always rather overwhelmed him. Fay was one of those people who always get their own way in this world, simply because they make themselves so fearfully disagreeable if they don't get it.

Word having been sent to Bryanstone Square that the little truant was safe, Mrs. Chandler accompanied Cyril to the drawing-room, and awaited her other guests. Mr. Chandler was strutting about the room (he was a short man, with iron-grey hair brushed up into a fierce cockatoo-like curl on the top of his head), conning over the list of who was to take who down to dinner. He was always in mortal terror of pairing the wrong people. His manner was more pompous than ever to-night, for his dinner-party was to include, besides other titled and untitled notabilities, a distinguished ambassador, a newly-married earl and his countess, and, oh joy! a certain bachelor duke.

The aroma of a title was sweet to old Chandler's nostrils. He loved to roll the mellifluous syllables over his tongue, and he did so unsparingly—totally regardless of good taste and etiquette. The thought of the duke made him condescend a little to-night in greeting young Sir Cyril, who for his part was secretly and

silently amused thereby, and took refuge in his most weary and most supercilious manner.

The other guests arrived in due course, and as their host affably shook hands with each in turn, he improved the occasion by informing them of "His Grace's" momentarily expected arrival. As the greater proportion of them, however, had met the gentleman in question on more than one occasion (without being much impressed thereby) they viewed the prospect with tranquillity. The dinner hour came and passed, however, without the noble guest making his appearance; and at last the crest-fallen and disappointed host was reluctantly obliged to conclude that he was not coming at all. Whereupon they all went in to dinner (hopelessly mixed up as to precedence), and feasted solemnly upon the many delicacies, in and out of season, which were provided for them.

The meal over, and a brief penance in the drawing-room also over, Cyril Northburgh took his departure as soon as he decently could. As he left the drawing-room one of the servants approached and said:

"Beg pardon, Sir Cyril, but Miss Dinwoodie would like to see you before you go."

"Ah, where is she?" was the languid answer.

"She is with Miss Adeane in the nursery, Sir Cyril."

Cyril sighed, and followed the man upstairs.

In the nursery he found his little cousin and Bee arrayed in much befrilled flannel dressing-gowns, seated beside a blazing fire. A small table, laden with cakes and sweets and fruits, stood on the hearthrug.

"We're having a party all to ourselves, Cyril," announced Fay, as the young man entered, "and we thought you might like to come. Sit down." Then she added, turning with an ineffable air of command to the old nurse, "You can go, Collins. We shall not want you in the meantime."

"But—er—I say, you know, I can't stay to-night," returned her cousin, sitting down, however, as he spoke. "I've no end of places to go to."

"Cyril, how selfish of you"—reproachfully—"when you know you have never spoken to Bee, and——"

But at this point Bee was discovered to be silently weeping, nor would she answer any inquiries as to the cause of her grief.

She looked so forlorn and miserable as she sat there, with large tears wandering down her cheeks, that even Cyril's tough heart was touched, and he set himself to amuse her so successfully that ere long her tears dried themselves in laughter. He was surprised to find "the little Chandler girl" such a well-bred child. As a matter of fact, she was several degrees more refined in looks and manners than his cousin Fay.

"Shouldn't wonder if she grows up pretty," he reflected absently, as he cracked an appalling quantity of walnuts for the young ladies' consumption, and listened to a minute recital of the afternoon's adventure.

When the little tongues ceased for a moment or two, he observed seriously :

"Well, look here, you know, it's not a nice sort of thing for little girls to do, running about London alone, and going to see fellows in their lodgings——"

"Oh, don't preach, Cyril," interrupted Fay rudely. "We're not going to do it again, and so what's the use of making such a fuss?"

But gentle little Bee put her hand into his and said shyly :

"It was naughty. Douglas said so too. We will never do it again."

Her little face looked so sweet and earnest, with the tears hardly dry upon the cheeks and lashes, that Cyril, rather to his own surprise, stooped and kissed her.

And this was the beginning of a strong feeling of interest in the "little Chandler girl," which was to materially affect his peace of mind in the future.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next four years passed swiftly. Bee grew tall and slim, and almost as self-possessed as Fay herself. She became initiated into the delights of "parties," and enjoyed them very much indeed. A governess came for an hour or two daily to Portland Place, and superintended mild lessons, which taxed neither the brains nor the patience of the young pupil.

Bee had now become the proud possessor of a pony, and rode every morning in the park with Fay Dinwoodie, attended by a correctly-got-up and severe-looking groom. On rare occasions Cyril Northburgh accompanied them instead of the groom, and this always gratified both children beyond words, though their



escort did not scruple to find continual fault with their seat in the saddle, and their manipulation of reins, whip and habit. Cyril himself looked remarkably well on horseback, and there were few horses could dispute his power of wrist and will. At other times he was, as Fay scornfully told him, "too-fearfully lazy for anything."

Bee and Douglas only met at long, long intervals; and for this the latter was entirely to blame. Many and pathetic were the curiously-written, and more curiously-worded little letters that found their way to Garth Street—imploing him to come to see her—to tell her if he had quite forgotten her—and assuring him that she was "always his most loving child, Bee."

But a stubborn desire for self-martyrdom prevented Douglas from accepting more than one out of every half-dozen of these invitations, though they were always fortified by permission from "grandmamma." Besides—he used to think bitterly—what had he in common with his "little one" now? Less than nothing.

Then, again, he had not much time for visiting. For the last three years he had held the post of secretary to an eccentric old bachelor named Redman, who wrote for several of the monthly reviews, and whose acquaintance young Conrath had made accidentally one foggy November afternoon three winters ago; when the old man and the young one were waiting to interview a certain popular editor. Douglas had a well-worn roll of manuscript in his hand, which had already performed a pretty fair journey round publishers' offices. After some desultory conversation on various topics, the old gentleman asked to be allowed to look at the manuscript the lad held, and having done so, gruffly complimented the young author upon the legibility of his handwriting.

"I like you, young fellow," he observed more gruffly still. "I like your face, and I like your voice; and, by George! you write a good hand. Do you write quickly? And are you in any employment? I have a reason for asking."

Douglas answered briefly that he was a swift writer, and that he was not in any employment.

"Humph!" rejoined his interlocutor, regarding him critically from under his shaggy grey eyebrows. "Let me have your name and address, will you?"

Several days later young Conrath received a curt note signed

"Simon Redman," offering him the post of non-resident secretary to that gentleman at a salary of £100 a year.

It was congenial work, and Mr. Redman, if somewhat exacting, was always just, and in many ways kind and indulgent.

Douglas still wooed literature, but fitfully. In these three years he had had several short stories accepted—and paid for (the terms are not always synonymous, you know). He was now, in his spare moments, writing a one-volume novel, and built many secret hopes and possibilities upon the chance of its success. In it, as in his short stories, he concealed his identity under the name of "Michael Armstrong."

He still lived in his old lodgings in Garth Street, but he was no longer shabby and starved-looking. As a matter of fact he was rather a fine-looking young fellow, well set-up, clean-limbed, and possessing a pair of eyes which, as Mrs. Dobbs had been heard to remark to a neighbour, "were enough to wile the bird from off the bush." The rest of his features, however, bore the old fault of his boyhood—they were too hard and resolute for beauty.

"Take these little wrinkles off your forehead, Douglas," Bee had said to him coaxingly on one of his rare visits to Portland Place. "They make you look so cross and old."

But though he had smiled and kissed her, the "little wrinkles" remained, and as time went on deepened and became permanent.

One winter night, when the dying year was old and frail, he received by the last post one of Bee's impulsive and wildly-written notes. It was even more spidery as to writing and incoherent as to matter than usual; but its gist was that the writer and Fay Dinwoodie were going to a boarding-school at Cheltenham immediately after Christmas, and would "dear, dear Douglas" come to Portland Place on the following afternoon, and they would have tea all alone, and a nice long talk.

Douglas sat thinking for a long time after he received this letter. Was it possible that the child was grown up enough to go to school? It seemed only yesterday that he remembered her such a tiny helpless baby. And yet—she must be twelve years old. Somehow the thought of her going away to this fashionable school appeared to raise an inseparable barrier between them. It came to him more vividly than ever, the difference there was likely to be in their lives and hopes and aims in the future. He saw that as time went on he must give

up his little child friend. And this meant more to him than most people would have had any idea of. For his was a more than usually loyal and faithful nature, and clung tenaciously to old interests and affections. As for Bee, he reflected, she would soon forget—or learn to do without—the brotherly love that had been hers so long. His friendship could do her no good—at least not yet. It was better, far better, that they should drift apart. But he would go to bid her good-bye.

So he went, and he and Bee had the nursery—now dignified by the name of the schoolroom—all to themselves.

Bee looked very sweet and dainty in her pretty velvet frock—her red-gold hair, many shades darker than in her babyhood, waving featherwise about her shoulders. As she sat opposite him, pouring out the tea in her gravely important little way, Douglas tried in vain to imagine the old days come back again when she had been his “little housekeeper,” and presided nightly over his tea-table. She never alluded to that antiquated joke now. Perhaps she had forgotten it. She was a dear little girl—and a loving one. But—she was not the child Bee any more, and somehow Douglas missed “the little one,” whom he found it increasingly difficult to identify with this rapidly growing-up maiden with such a wealth of smart frocks, such an apparent knowledge of fashionable ways and people, and a trick of domineering over and patronizing Douglas himself at times, which long ago she would have thought nothing less than impious.

“Why don’t you have your hair cut, Douglas?” she said in the pretty imperious way she had acquired of late, “and why don’t you part it in the middle? You would look ever so much nicer, you know.”

They were sitting before the fire, Douglas having declined further refreshment in the shape of tea and cakes. At her words he leaned back in his chair and looked at her steadily, a curious little smile parting his firm young lips.

“You find a great many faults in me now, my little sister,” he said slowly.

“Oh no,” she answered, laying her head coaxingly against his knee. “But Fay says you would be ever so much nicer-looking than Cyril if you would only——”

“Don’t quote Fay to me, if you please,” interrupted Douglas

coldly. "It is not of the least consequence to me what she thinks of my appearance. I am sorry you are to be school companions. She is making you as precocious and unchildlike as she is herself. You are not my little Bee any more. You are not a child any more. I could fancy sometimes that the old days at Garth Street were all a dream, and that my little house-keeper and sister, who loved me so, was a dream also. You did not think so much of smart clothes and looks then, Bee. I suppose by the time you come back from this grand school you will cut my acquaintance altogether. And perhaps it will be as well. I have nothing in common with your new friends."

Whereupon Bee, forgetful of her twelve years and the repose of manner which Fay considered fitting at that mature age, flung her arms round his neck, and sobbed out that he was her own dear brother always, and that he was cruel to say such things just now when she was going away so soon, and that she would never forget him—never.

But Douglas did not receive her penitence as he used to do. He only removed her arms gently, and stood up, saying it was time for him to go.

"Why no, Bee dear, of course I am not angry," he said, as she clung to him repentantly and tearfully, and begged him to forgive her, and stay with her a little longer. "I shouldn't have spoken to you so harshly, dear, I know. But you see I am an old-fashioned, plain-spoken fellow, and not up to fashionable ways."

He smiled as he spoke; but his smile was strained and difficult, and Bee, child as she was, knew that she had said a thing which might be forgiven—but would not soon be forgotten.

And she was right—Douglas was bitterly hurt. He was far from being a hero, poor lad, and he had a queer temper—a temper which not even his mother had been able at all times to calculate upon. Perhaps the lonely life he led had not tended to soften the hard knots in his nature—these hard knots which we so often find in strong characters, seeming to run alongside the severer virtues, and marring and effacing all the sweetness thereof. It takes many and various forms of suffering to soften such natures as these—if they are ever to be softened. And as yet Douglas had only suffered in one groove, so to speak. But it was a groove that hardens all but the very highest type of human character—

which his was far from being—the groove of grinding poverty, the never-ceasing, heart-sickening question of ways and means, the constant presence of the grisly spectre that threatens to separate body and soul. It is a spectre that usually drives away all gentler angels, and calls up other and more grisly spectres still to bear it company.

The softer virtues were fast disappearing in the heart of this young fellow of twenty-one. It was a question whether his heart would ever melt sufficiently to welcome them back again. Nevertheless, by one of these curious contradictions which nature is fond of presenting to us, he was as sensitive in some ways as a girl, in spite of all his pride and hard reserve.

And Bee's words had cut him to a degree out of all proportion to their meaning.

He said no more, however, but bid her good-bye in the grave, tender fashion he kept for her alone, chiding her lightly for her tears.

So they parted ; and it so happened that for six long years they did not meet again.

*(To be continued.)*